GENEVA'S DEAD END
MICHAEL B. OREN
AND YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

IOWA'S BEAUTY CONTEST
RYAN LIZZA

WWW.TNR.COM ▶ DECEMBER 15, 2003

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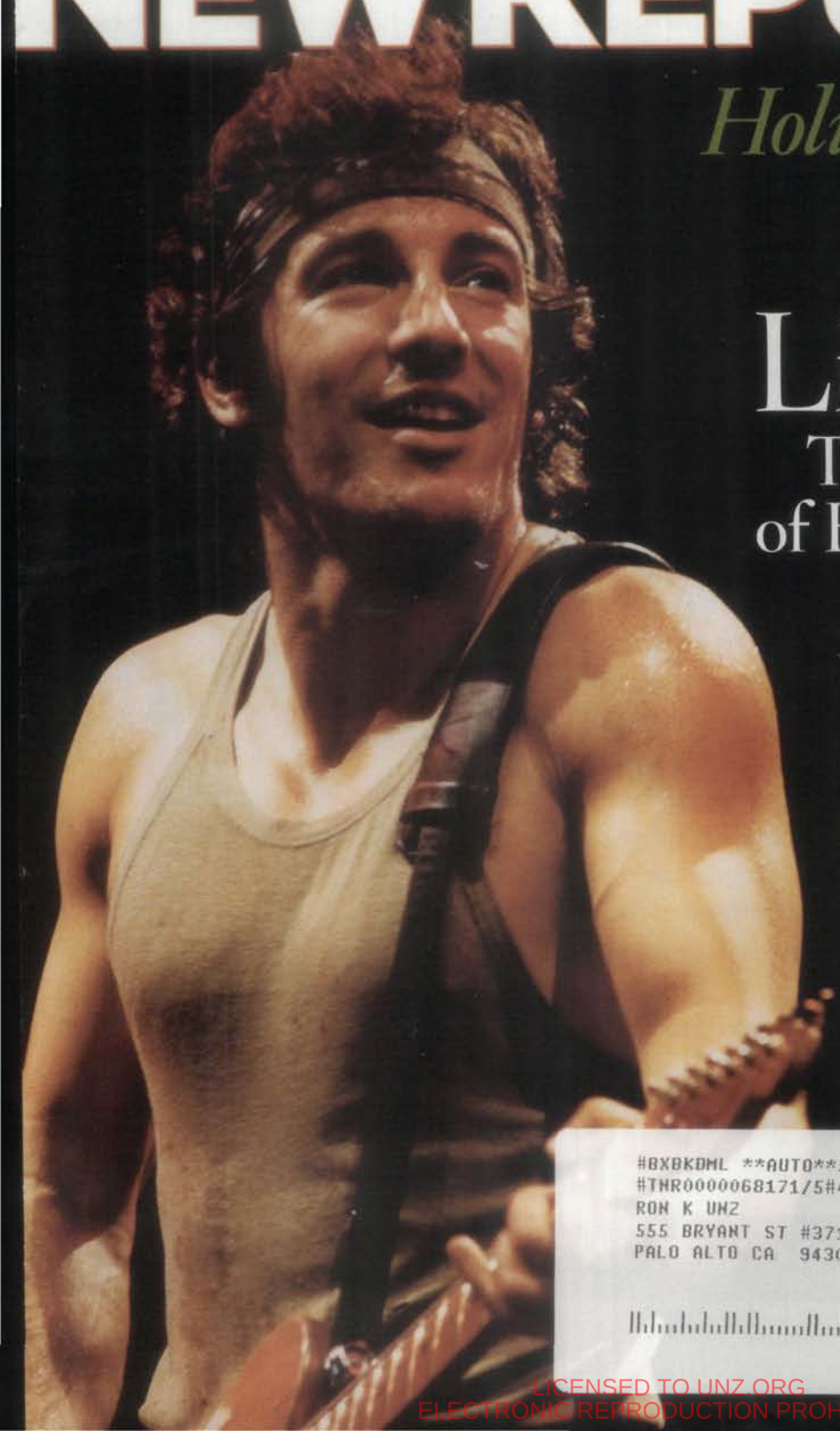
Holiday Arts Issue



Tramps Like Who?
The Inauthenticity of Bruce Springsteen
DAVID HAJDU

PLUS:

Russell Crowe at Sea

Kevin Kline's Falstaff

The Most Beautiful Books in the World

What Was *K Street*?

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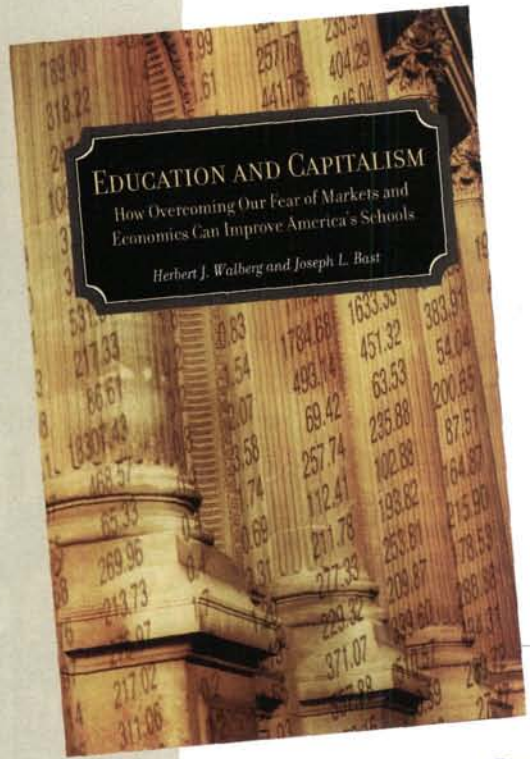
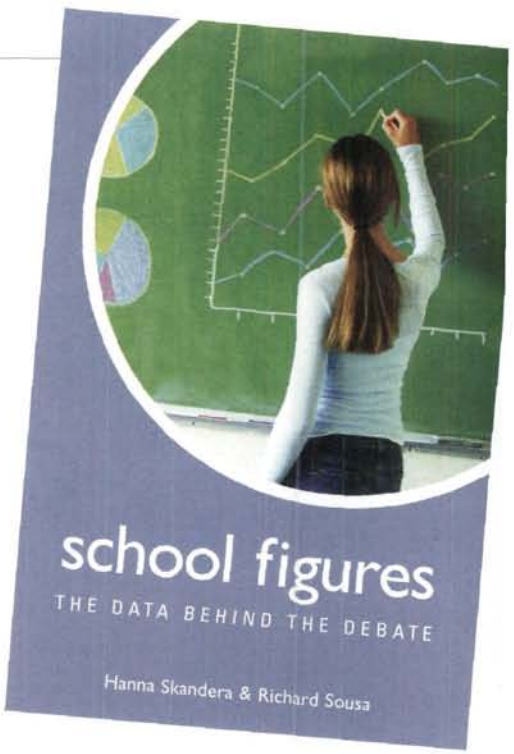

EDUCATION AND CAPITALISM
How Overcoming Our Fear of Markets and Economics Can Improve America's Schools
Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Bast

Education and Capitalism

Providing a clear defense of the free market and its relationship to a quality education, Bast and Walberg offer a unique and needed perspective in the education reform conversation. A few highlights from *Education and Capitalism:*

- For more than 200 years, schools in the United States competed for students and relied on private financing, and American education was the envy of the world.
- Programs that bring back competition and parental choice, such as vouchers, can improve student achievement and school productivity.
- Members of the public will not embrace market-based school reform until they understand how markets work and trust them with the education of their children.



School Figures

"Remarkably, this careful compilation of the most reliable facts about our K–12 schooling is *lively*. Its authors understand that facts don't fully speak their own meaning and that evidence is only as illuminating as the theory that interprets it. By relating educational data to specific propositions, Skandera and Sousa have brought intellectual order and, amazingly, interest, to the facts and figures. This is an enormously useful and accurate handbook for anyone concerned about our schools—for experts as well as parents, and policymakers."

— E. D. Hirsch

Professor of education and humanities, University of Virginia, and founder and chairman of the Core Knowledge Foundation

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND THE ARTS

DECEMBER 15, 2003 WASHINGTON, D.C. ISSUE 4,639 VOLUME 229

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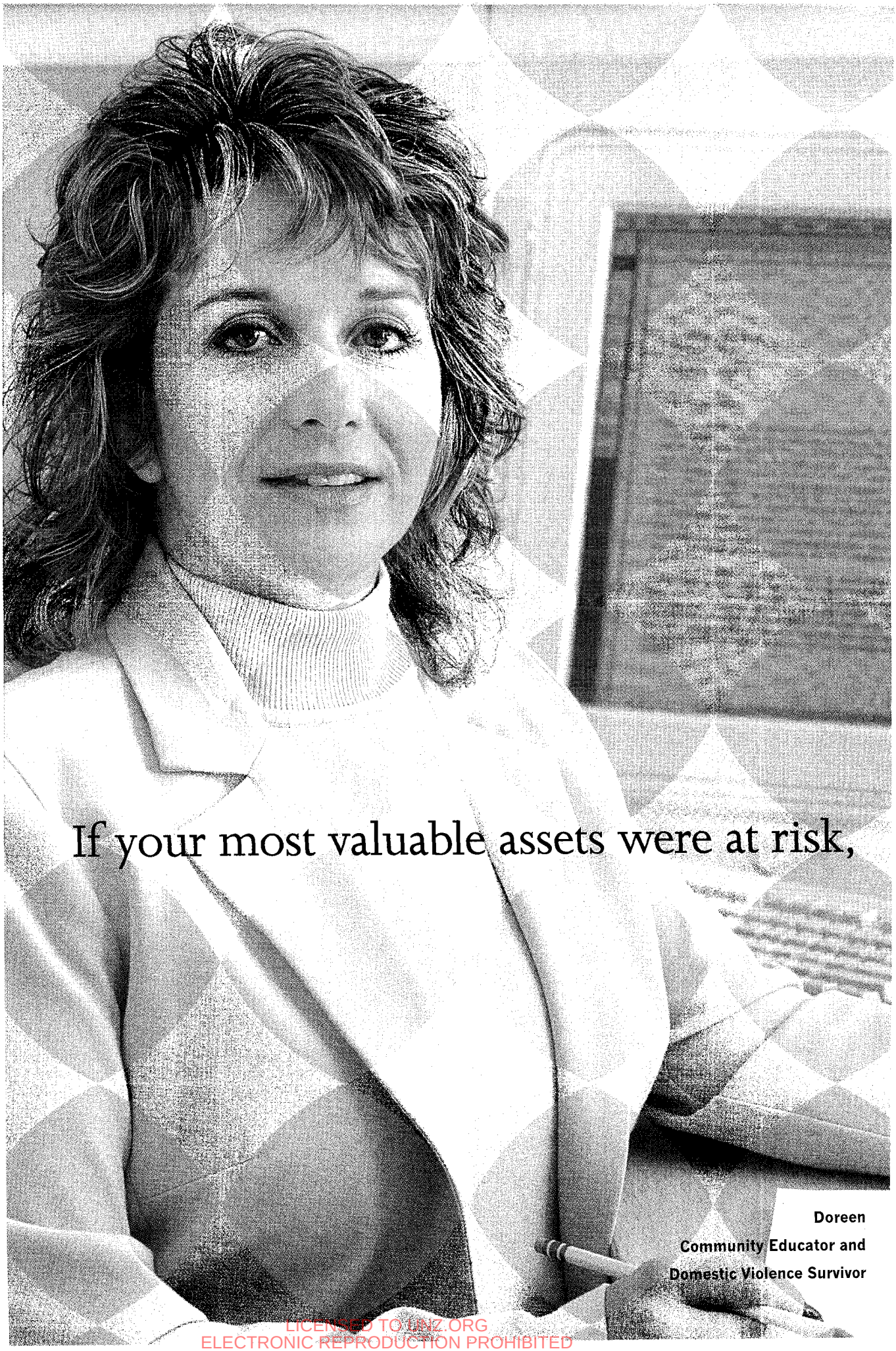

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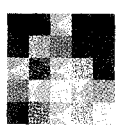

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HOME RUN

THANK YOU FOR ZADIE SMITH'S brilliant explanation of Kafka's challenge to the novel and novelists ("The Limited Circle is Pure," November 3). But Smith (no relation to me) misses the main point: Kafka didn't watch baseball. If he had seen, for example, two particular eighth innings from the recent Cubs/Marlins and Red Sox/Yankees series, he would have better known how to connect with readers. No Red Sox or Cubs fan sees anything all that difficult to grasp in a doorkeeper who says: I cannot grant you entry through this eighth inning. This eighth inning was made only for you.

DOUGLAS K. SMITH
LaGrangeville, New York

BASE FOUNDATION

IN THE NOVEMBER 3 "DECLARATIONS," Martin Peretz makes several statements about the Ford Foundation's funding of Palestinian organizations that are untrue. The claim that Ford is inattentive to Palestinian organizations' use of our funds and that we have supported "organizations with ties to terrorists" are unfounded. We monitor our grantees carefully and comply meticulously with all legal and other oversight requirements to ensure that funds are not diverted for terrorist activities. We check all potential grantees against the U.S. government's list of known terrorists and recheck before a grant is approved. Our entire list of active grants is checked every two weeks. In fact, one story Peretz cited in making these claims clearly stated that the reporter "has not identified any instances of Ford monies being linked to terrorism." With regard to financial oversight, we routinely review grantees, and, if we uncover evidence of problems, we audit, investigate, and, when necessary, take corrective action.

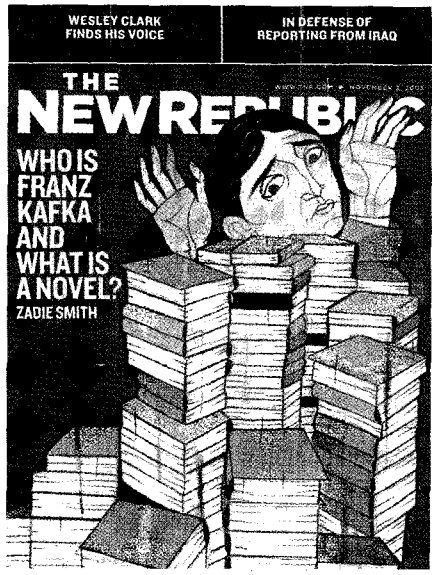
In the Middle East, Ford supports organizations seeking to build bridges between Israelis and Palestinians, promote tolerance and human rights, and strengthen democratic institutions essential to a lasting peace. Ford abhors anti-Semitism and other forms of hate speech. We have never supported—and would never support—religious, ethnic, or other forms of bigotry. Nor would we fund groups that advocate violence. It's especially important to make that clear in light of growing incidents of anti-Semitism around the world.

BRADFORD SMITH
Vice President
The Ford Foundation
New York, New York

PERETZ EMBRACES ATTACKS ON THE Ford Foundation by Edwin Black of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that claim the foundation is supporting anti-Semitic activity by Palestinian organizations and is careless about whether some of its funds may be diverted to the support of terrorist activities. Ford has responded forthrightly and persuasively on its own behalf to these serious charges. I write instead to condemn Peretz's assertion, in passing, that "the Ford Foundation has long been reckless in its U.S. grants." This baseless charge is itself the height of recklessness. I have no idea what Peretz thinks is reckless behavior by Ford or whether he is prepared to back up his claim, but it must be said that, across a broad range of fields—including education, culture, and social and economic justice—the rest of philanthropy stands in Ford's shadow and the rest of the country in its debt.

GARA LaMARCHE
Vice President and Director
of U.S. Programs
Open Society Institute
New York, New York

MARTIN PERETZ REPLIES:
Bradford Smith's protestations notwithstanding, the Ford Foundation has, through its president, Susan Berresford, now admitted in a letter to Representative Jerry Nadler virtually every accusation made against the Foundation by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *The New York Sun*, *The Forward*, and yours truly. Not that her admissions are couched candidly. But their meanings are crystal-clear: "We deeply regret that Foundation


WESLEY CLARK FINDS HIS VOICE
IN DEFENSE OF REPORTING FROM IRAQ
THE NEW REPUBLIC
WHO IS FRANZ KAFKA AND WHAT IS A NOVEL?
ZADIE SMITH

grantees may have taken part in unacceptable behavior in Durban." She doesn't exactly specify this behavior. But the 2001 U.N. World Conference Against Racism in Durban was a Witches' Sabbath of hatred against Jews and Israel, and Ford grantees were at the forefront of that hatred. The initial charges against Ford also accused it of not adequately monitoring its beneficiaries' activities or auditing how they spend Ford's money. At first Ford denied any of this. "We do not believe," stated another Ford vice president, that anything occurring at Durban "can be described as 'agitation.'" But weeks later, the somewhat frightened Ford bureaucracy finally confessed to being "disgusted by the vicious anti-Semitic activity seen at Durban" and went on to detail steps it would take to guarantee that grantees not take part "in unacceptable, ugly and provocative behavior," which now explicitly includes "challeng[ing] the very existence of legitimate, sovereign states like Israel." Berresford's letter admits that grant recipients had not honored even the perfunctory reporting requirements and that Ford had simply let these violations of its

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rules pass. The same letter concedes that Ford has already suspended its funding from an organization called LAW, the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment. LAW was central to the mayhem in Durban and, moreover, had misused millions of philanthropic dollars, much of it Ford's. Smith's boss has pulled the rug out from under him—and from under much of Gara LaMarche's grievance, as well. As for what I called Ford's "recklessness" in the United States, let me simply allude to one Ford initiative under the leadership of McGeorge Bundy, the "local control" venture in the New York City public schools circa 1968. This pitted races, religious groups, and ethnicities against each other, big time. It did more to undermine public education in the city than anything before and anything since. Of course, Bundy's Ford Foundation, like its partner, Mayor John Lindsay, was full of good intentions. But, frankly, I do not believe that Ford's behavior in the Middle East was built on good intentions. The Ford folk are not stupid. They know haters when they see them. They wanted to squeeze Israel, and they allied themselves with despicable people to do so. Like old Henry Ford himself. It's sad that the family Foundation is not in the family's hands. They learned from his mistakes and better citizens and are wiser philanthropists than Berresford and her sanctimonious crowd.

CIVIC CENTER

PETER BEINART'S COLUMN CONCERNing politics in foreign policy was a worthwhile critique of those in Congress who determine foreign policy positions based on whether or not their party controls the White House ("Party Line," November 3). Yet, Beinart's analysis ignored a large segment of the Democratic Party. It's true that the Democrats have not had a coherent foreign policy. But a group of centrist Democrats have proposed an alternative approach to foreign policy. As E.J. Dionne noted in a recent *Washington Post* editorial, the group "offers specific ideas on curbing weapons proliferation, improving homeland security and reorganizing the military for the new tasks it faces.

While Beinart makes some good arguments, he completely overlooks these centrist Democrats, who attack President Bush on his ideologically motivated tax cuts and his lack of commitment to fiscal discipline. It is on these principles that I, and many others in my party, opposed the $87 billion supplemental funding. I strongly agree that we need to support our troops, but our nation has many expensive, pressing needs and always will. In the past several years, meeting some of these needs has pushed our deficit to nearly $400 billion. Past a certain point, this is not sustainable, and future needs, even those rising to the level of a crisis, will go unmet as we struggle to pay the interest on our massive debt. The only responsible policy to protect both the Iraqis and our national security is to support our troops and our rebuilding efforts in Iraq; the right policy would be to pay for the costs in Iraq by reducing the tax cut or cutting spending now.

I, along with a number of Democrats, voted against the bill with the hope that it would be rejected and that Bush would come to Congress and work with us to fully fund our troops and the rebuilding of Iraq in a fiscally responsible manner. Our motive was not party politics but responsible policy. Our vote was in the best interest of our military and taxpayers and was aimed at growing sustainable support to rebuild Iraq and bring peace to the region.

REPRESENTATIVE ADAM SMITH
Co-chair of the New Democrat Coalition
Washington, D.C.

FAMILY AFFAIR

ALAN WOLFE MISUNDERSTANDS THE history of women and American higher education when he writes in his TNR review of *Family Circle: The Boudins and the Aristocracy of the Left*, "Unable to win acceptance to an Ivy League university, she went to Bryn Mawr" ("Teach Your Children," November 3). When Kathy Boudin applied to college in the early '60s, the only Ivy League schools that accepted women were Penn and Cornell. Yale, Princeton, and Harvard remained exclusively male. Radcliffe, which had an arrangement for "joint instruction" with Harvard, was an independent college, maintained its own separate admissions process, and awarded separate Radcliffe—not Harvard—diplomas. Radcliffe students were in fact not permitted in the Harvard undergraduate library until 1967—two years after Boudin had graduated from college. At the time Boudin applied to college, the most prestigious choices for ambitious young women were not the Ivy League schools but the Seven Sisters: Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Barnard, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley.

DREW FAUST
Dean, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

THE FACTUAL ERRORS IN WOLFE'S piece are pervasive. To take two examples of the countless that pertain to me, even basic fact-checking would have revealed that I was never diagnosed as autistic. Worse yet, the fact that I never attended P.S. 9, as the article claims, suggests that the author invented quotes and attributed them to my grandfather to depict him as an elitist racist. While I cannot speak to the accuracy of all of the details in the piece, the profound, basic factual errors about me suggest that at best this piece was not carefully researched and cast doubt on the veracity of the source.

CHESA BOUDIN
Oxford, England

ALAN WOLFE REPLIES:
I can assure Dean Faust that I am fully aware of the discrimination women faced in the year that both Kathy Boudin and I applied to college; it would be difficult not to be when so many talented women of my age could not attend Yale or Princeton. Nonetheless the sentence that caught her eye stands. Five Ivy League universities accepted women then: Penn and Cornell, as she notes, and Columbia through Barnard, Brown through Pembroke, and Harvard through Radcliffe. Women who applied to the latter three were attracted to them, in part, because of their Ivy League connections. Moreover, my point was that Boudin's admission to Bryn Mawr was disappointing to her parents. To strengthen that point, I could have added that she was rejected by Oberlin, but I did not think it necessary to embellish what was obvious.

If Chesa Boudin has a problem with the quotes Susan Braudy attributes to his grandfather, he should probably blame his grandmother, who was Braudy's major source of information about the family. I appreciate his corrections on two points: He was diagnosed with various learning disabilities but not with autism, and his adopted parents planned to send him to P.S. 9 but never actually did. ■

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Manservant

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

Is President Bush a conservative? His successful push for the Medicare bill, as well as his unsuccessful (for now) push for an energy bill, have prompted another round of gentle tsk-tsking by conservative pundits. "One side advantage of the measure is that it should, at least, retire for good and all that absurd claim that President Bush is some kind of ideological extremist," writes former Bush speechwriter David Frum in *National Review Online*. "It's sobering to consider that with the prescription-drug benefit, George W. Bush has created the first major new federal entitlement since Gerald Ford signed the Earned Income Tax Credit a quarter-century ago. If that isn't 'moderation,' what is?"

This argument betrays a common misunderstanding of the precise nature of the president's right-wingery. Bush's extremism does not lie in the purity of his devotion to the teachings of Milton Friedman but rather in the slavishness of his fealty to K Street. The distinction is a fine one, but it's highly revealing. In most instances, being pro–free market and pro-business amount to the same thing. Businesses usually want the government out of their way, which is why the business lobby threw its weight behind Bush's efforts to cut taxes, scuttle workplace safety standards, and so on. The way you tell the difference between a free-marketer and a servant of business is how he behaves when the interests of the two diverge. And all the evidence, including the Medicare and energy bills, points to the conclusion that Bush is happy to throw free-market conservatism out the window when business interests so desire.

Consider, for instance, the $180 billion farm bill signed by Bush in 2002. The notion that taxpayers should subsidize farmers rather than, say, butchers or T-shirt salesmen represents the most archaic and unjustifiable kind of government intervention. But farmers have lots of clout in Washington, in part because they're relatively affluent (farm households earn more on average than nonfarm households) but mainly due to the disproportionate representation of rural states in the Senate and electoral college. In the course of showering federal largesse upon farmers a year ago, some senators tried to mitigate their shame slightly by limiting payments to $275,000 per farmer. Republicans removed this modest measure. Bush also capitulated to the textile and steel industries by imposing tariffs on competing imports, overruling the advice of his economic advisers. (Only after steel-consuming industries complained and the World Trade Organization ruled the tariffs illegal did Bush finally relent.)

A cornerstone of Bush's domestic policy is his aptitude for economic giveaways that are supported by neither liberals nor true conservatives—indeed, that are supported only by those who profit from them monetarily or politically. Take the energy bill, which lavished subsidies upon favored industries. Not only did environmentalists and mainstream liberal economists denounce it, so did conservative scholars at think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. Everything you need to know about the politics and policy of the energy bill is contained within one sentence that appeared in *The Washington Post* last month: "The assembled lobbyists—representing farm, corn, soybean, wind, geothermal, coal, oil and gas interests that benefit from provisions in the 1,100 page bill—gave [GOP Senator and energy-bill champion Pete] Domenici a standing ovation, and he thanked them for helping to push the legislation to the brink of passage, according to one person present."

Similarly, the Medicare bill, supposedly evidence of Bush's moderation, is in fact typical of his domestic agenda, which revolves around granting favors to powerful interest groups. Again, most of the major liberal and conservative think tanks opposed the bill. But the pharmaceutical companies were ecstatic with it: Not only does it subsidize drug purchases, it specifically prohibits the federal government from using its negotiating power to hold down the cost of the drugs it purchases. (Got that? Those who spend your tax dollars are *forbidden* from striking a good bargain with the drug companies.) The American Medical Association was brought on board with a promise to boost Medicare reimbursements. And employers received federal subsidies—more than twice what they requested—to help cover the cost of their retirees' health care. As Thomas Scully, the Bush appointee who heads the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, put it, businesses received "way beyond their wildest requests" and "should be having a giant ticker-tape parade." Perhaps deeming a ticker-tape parade unseemly, the Business Roundtable and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce instead launched a lobbying campaign on the bill's behalf.

Note that all these measures would require the government to spend more money. But they triggered nary a complaint from conservatives. What they hated about the Medicare bill was the part about helping senior citizens buy medicine. When the government gives money to sick people, you see, that's incipient socialism. When it gives money to drug companies, doctors, and employers, that's the free market in action.

All this is in keeping with the recent pattern of Republican governance. Last year, the Associated Press conducted a remarkable study showing how federal spending patterns had changed since the GOP took over Congress in 1995. Republicans did not shrink federal spending, it found, they merely transferred it, from poorer Democratic districts to wealthier Republican ones. This, the A.P. reported, "translates into more business loans and farm subsidies, and fewer public housing grants and food stamps." In 1995, Democratic districts received an average of $35 million more in federal largesse than Republican districts, which seems roughly fair given that Democratic districts have more people in need of government aid. By 2001, the gap had not only reversed, it had increased nearly twentyfold, with GOP districts receiving an average of $612 million more than Democratic ones. Justifying this shift, then–Majority Leader Dick Armey said, "To the victor goes the spoils." It would be a worthy slogan for Bush's reelection campaign.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Peter Beinart is out of the country. He will return to writing TRB in two weeks.

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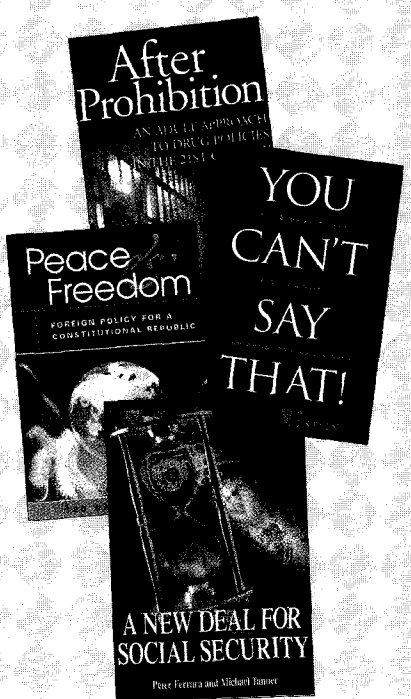
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UPDATE

SAUDI ARABIA'S ACTIONS AND ARRESTS

WAR ON TERRORISM

There is no question that the international community has been engaged in a fierce war with a shadow enemy since September 2001. Nations around the world recognize the responsibility not only to protect their own citizens from the threat of terrorism, but to protect the citizens of other countries as well. Every government has had to take a stand in the fight against evil. Often, the truth is hard to determine because terrorists hide behind so many flags.

As part of a public debate in the United States, Saudi Arabia has come under much scrutiny. While our leaders have clearly stated our position and denounced terrorism at every turn, we recognize that we will ultimately be judged not by our words, but by our deeds.

Since September 2001, Saudi Arabia has arrested more than 600 individuals with suspected ties to terrorism. Over the course of these arrests, Saudi security officers also seized large quantities of high explosives, automatic rifles and rocket launchers, tons of bomb-making materials and devices, false identity cards and documents, and large amounts of cash. Many security officers have been killed or injured in recent counter-terror activities.

Many of these arrests have been highlighted in the world press, including:

• Three clerics, Ali Fahd Al-Khudair, Ahmed Hamoud Mufreh Al-Khaledi and Nasir Ahmed Al-Fuhaid, were arrested after calling for support of the terrorists who carried out the Riyadh attacks.

• Saudi police killed two suspected terrorists and arrested six other suspected Al-Qaeda militants after a shootout in the holy city of Makkah on Monday, November 3, 2003. Officers also seized a large cache of weapons they believe were stockpiled for attacks during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

• On October 5, 2003 security forces arrested three suspects during a raid in the desert to the east of Riyadh. On October 8, 2003 security forces raided a farm in the northern Muleda area of Qasim Province and were able to arrest a suspect. Three other suspects fled the scene.

• Security forces killed one terrorist suspect and arrested two others in an apartment in the city of Jizan on September 23, 2002. The suspects were armed with machine guns and pistols and a large quantity of ammunition.

• Saudi security forces, July 28, killed six terrorist suspects and injured one more in a gunfight at a farm in Qasim Province, 220 miles north of the capital, Riyadh. Two Saudi security officers were killed and eight suffered minor injuries. Four people who harbored the suspects were arrested.

• Three men were arrested at a checkpoint in Al-Ka'akia district of Makkah on July 25 for possessing printed material that included a "religious edict" in support of terrorist acts against Western targets.

• The Ministry of Interior announced on July 21 that Saudi authorities had defused terrorist operations which were about to be carried out against vital installations and arrested 16 members of a number of terrorist cells after searching their hideouts in farms and houses in Riyadh Province, Qasim Province and the Eastern Province.

• Turki Nasser Mishaal Aldandany, another top Al-Qaeda operative and mastermind of the May 12 bombings, was killed on July 3, 2003 along with three other suspects in a gun battle with security forces that had them surrounded.

• Ali Abdulrahman Said Alfagsi Al-Ghamdi, a.k.a. Abu Bakr Al-Azdi, who surrendered to Saudi authorities. Al-Ghamdi, considered one of the top Al-Qaeda operatives in Saudi Arabia, is suspected of being one of the masterminds of the May 12 bombings in Riyadh.

• Yousif Salih Fahad Al-Ayeeri, a.k.a. Swift Sword, a major Al-Qaeda operational planner and fundraiser, was killed on May 31 while fleeing from a security patrol.

As the War on Terrorism wages on, Saudi Arabia remains committed to rooting out and bringing to justice those who perpetrate such heinous acts.

"I vow to my fellow citizens, and to the friends who reside among us, that the State will be vigilant about their security and well-being. Our nation is capable, by the Grace of God Almighty and the unity of its citizens, to confront and destroy the threat posed by a deviant few and those who endorse or support them. With the help of God Almighty, we shall prevail."

Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz,
May 13, 2003

"After the terrible attacks in Riyadh on May the 12th, the government of Saudi Arabia has intensified its longstanding efforts against the Al-Qaeda network...America and Saudi Arabia face a common terrorist threat, and we appreciate the strong, continuing efforts of the Saudi government in fighting that threat."

President George W. Bush,
July 1, 2003

THE PEOPLE OF SAUDI ARABIA
Allies Against Terrorism

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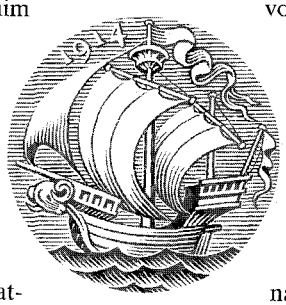
Spare the Rod?

IN THE FIRST half of his presidency, George W. Bush was masterful at co-opting enough Democrats in Congress to advance his agenda on education and tax cuts. But the president didn't repay the favor. In the 2002 congressional elections, the White House savaged many of the very same Democrats who'd voted with the president on his top legislation. So Democrats licked their wounds, chalked up the midterm debacle to experience, and vowed that their days of helping Bush were over. But, as the two biggest legislative fights of the year—on Medicare and energy—came to their conclusions last month, it didn't seem as if Democrats had learned a thing.

Consider first the Medicare bill. This costly, dangerous piece of legislation might never have made it to a vote were it not for a critical summer endorsement given to its Senate version by Ted Kennedy (see Jonathan Cohn, "Careless," page 17). Recall that two years earlier, the Massachusetts senator had given his symbolic backing to Bush's education reform bill, only to see the president subsequently betray him by shortchanging the money to implement it. Rather than learn from this mistake, Kennedy repeated it. By the time Congress was considering a final bill well to the right of the version Kennedy had naïvely backed—leading him to bray on the Senate floor about "privatizing the Medicare System"—it was too late to stop it.

At least Kennedy was duped. Less forgivable are Democratic Senators Max Baucus and John Breaux, whose public backing of the final GOP Medicare bill gave it a critical—and utterly misleading—veneer of bipartisanship. Once again, this was a sadly familiar tale. In 2001, around the time Kennedy was fawning over the education bill, Baucus and Breaux were helping to pass the Bush tax cut under a "bipartisan" label. Although Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle was said to be furious at both men, his anger didn't stop the two of them from pulling the same stunt again last month.

Which is why it's time for Democrats to do more than get angry—and actually punish their most egregious defectors. Party leaders, for instance, should at least raise the specter of stripping Baucus of his position as ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, where he continually uses his power to undermine his own party. And, if Breaux doesn't retire at the end of next year, Democrats might consider withholding support for his reelection or perhaps encouraging a challenger to run against him in the primary—much as the White House quietly encouraged John Sununu to run against renegade New Hampshire Senator Bob Smith in the 2002 Republican primary.



Of course, it would be easier for Senate Democratic leaders to enforce this sort of discipline if they stood on higher ground themselves. The GOP energy bill is one of the tackiest documents to sully the Capitol in recent memory—short on solutions and long on pork projects and tax subsidies for narrow interests. And, while Senate Democrats succeeded in filibustering the bill to at least a temporary death, they did so without Daschle, who, facing reelection next year, backed the bill for wasteful ethanol subsidies that would benefit his South Dakota constituents. Other senior Democrats, such as North Dakota Senators Kent Conrad and Byron Dorgan, joined Daschle's embarrassing stance after they were apparently bought off by the last-minute inclusion of new coal plants in their state. (To their discredit, Conrad and Dorgan also both supported the Medicare bill.) In all, 13 Senate Democrats voted against their own party's filibuster of the energy bill, which succeeded only with the help of a handful of principled Republicans.

Democrats in the House acquitted themselves somewhat better. On the Medicare bill, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi did such a good job of holding her party together that House Republican leaders had to keep the roll call open for an unprecedented three hours while they threatened and bribed dissenting Republicans to change their votes. But the House Democrats' discipline slipped on the energy bill, as 46 of them voted for the measure. Pelosi recently suggested she might punish Democrats who defect on critical votes. She must now follow through in dealing with the Democrats who defected on the energy bill.

Rank partisanship isn't attractive, and bullying members of one's own party isn't pleasant. But the Bush administration's three-year string of narrow victories on controversial legislation has amply demonstrated that these approaches can be terribly effective, especially when Democratic leaders allow members of their party to vote their consciences or, more often, their parochial interests. Sometimes the only way to respond to an opponent's unsavory methods is to emulate them. Now is one of those times. ■

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NOTEBOOK

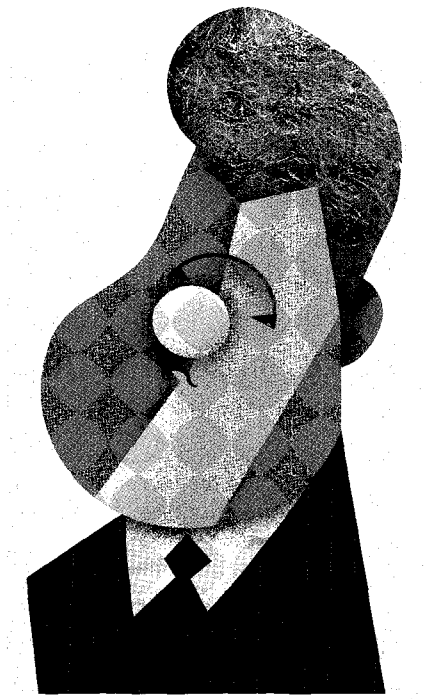
CLINTON TWISTS THE TRUTH (SURPRISE!) . . . RUMSFELD DEFIES REASON (SHOCK!)

ADVERSE REACTION

SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT THABO Mbeki's stance on AIDS—namely, that it results from poverty, not HIV—has for years been a well-known thorn in the side of AIDS activists and public health officials worldwide. So it's hard to imagine anyone praising Mbeki's "courage and commitment" in fighting the disease. Yet that's exactly what Bill Clinton did on November 20 in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed. Heralding South Africa's decision to provide free antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, along with aggressive education and preventive care, to all South Africans, Clinton wrote, "Thanks to Mr. Mbeki, South Africa is showing leadership in the treatment of people already infected."

Hardly. True, the program is admirable, bringing ARV drugs to the nation's 4.5 million HIV-positive people. But those people don't have Mbeki to thank. Indeed, for years Mbeki's office stifled a government study showing the feasibility of providing cheap ARV drugs to South Africans and only accepted the plan after the study was leaked to the press. Nor can Mbeki claim ownership of the current plan, having maintained since last April that all government AIDS policy is set by the Cabinet, not him. Of course, that stance hasn't stopped him from continuing to display his ignorance: In September, he told *The Washington Post* that he didn't know a single person who had AIDS—this despite the death of his HIV-positive spokesman in 2001. Nor has he ever corrected idiotic statements from his Cabinet members, such as Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang's March assertion that AIDS can be cured by a steady diet of garlic and potatoes.

If South Africans should be thanking anyone, it's Zackie Achmat, a male prostitute–turned–leader of the Treatment Action Campaign, an aggressive activist movement that has made AIDS a major political issue in South Africa.



Bill Clinton

That success drove down Mbeki's poll numbers and forced him to do something about his country's epidemic before next year's national elections. But, even with Mbeki facing significant pressure, the ARV drug program only really got underway with funding and planning assistance from U.S. foundations—the William Jefferson Clinton Foundation, to be exact. So perhaps Clinton's praise for Mbeki isn't surprising. But it's still offensive. Yes, South Africa's experience "will provide valuable lessons—even a model—for other large nations." But the most important lesson is that anyone concerned about AIDS should ignore Thabo Mbeki.

SECURITY BREACH

LAST MONTH, 79 AMERICAN SOLDIERS were killed in Iraq, a tragedy compounded by the deaths of dozens of coalition soldiers, diplomats, foreign aid workers, and Iraqi civilians at the hands of Iraqi guerrillas. You would think that November's bloodshed—the worst since the occupation began—would cause the Bush administration to rethink its insistence on reducing troop levels by next spring and replacing them with barely trained Iraqis. You'd be wrong. Instead, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld tried last week to convince reporters that things really aren't that bad. After all, he noted, we lost tens of thousands of troops in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, far more than the mere hundreds we've lost in Iraq.

Rumsfeld's blasé attitude toward casualties is disturbing, but more disturbing still is his failure to realize that the administration's Iraqification strategy may be part of the reason for those casualties. On Saturday, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez acknowledged that some of the Iraqis hired for the new security services have been carrying out attacks on American troops. "There have been instances where police were coordinating attacks against the coalition and against the people," Sanchez said. Baathist infiltration of the police forces should be no surprise given that we've armed 75,000 Iraqis in the last two months. Nor does it seem to trouble the Bush administration. Rumsfeld characteristically dismissed concerns about the Iraqi forces, telling a TV interviewer in early November, "We vet them, we check them against . . . a number of databases, and, if they pass the first vetting, we go ahead and bring them in and train them." But Lieutenant Colonel Larry "Pepper" Jackson, who supervises some of that training, acknowledges this might not be sufficient: "What's to say what's too fast?" he asked *The Washington Post*. "I don't know."

Rather than try to answer that question before giving more guns to more Iraqis who might well use them to shoot more Americans, the Coalition Provisional Authority has decided to create *another* armed Iraqi force. Worse, this militia, which will be composed of fighters from parties represented on the

DAVID COWLES

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Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), could have political goals that conflict with our own. The IGC parties, which fear rejection in the upcoming vote for a transitional national assembly, have been seeking ways to maintain their hold on power, and this new militia could offer them the means to do so. As the *Post* reported, some Iraqis fear the militia "could be used after the U.S. occupation ends to suppress political dissent or target enemies." Until now, Coalition Provisional Authority chief L. Paul Bremer shared that fear, saying at a September press conference, "We do not believe organized militias are consistent with an independent, unified Iraq." But, then, neither is much else that the Bush administration is doing these days.

MARKET INSTABILITY

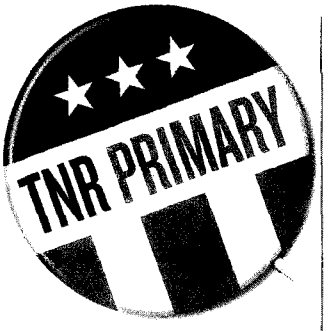
"EARLY SALES APPEAR MODEST AS HOLIDAY SEASON BEGINS"
—*The New York Times* headline, December 1

"HOLIDAY BUYING STARTS HOT: SALES, UP 5% FROM '02, TRACKING FOR BEST SEASON IN 5 YEARS"
—*USA Today* headline, same day

CORRECTION OF THE YEAR

"BECAUSE OF AN EDITING ERROR, a story on the front page yesterday misattributed a quote from the speaker on an audiotape purportedly of Saddam Hussein as coming from Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota.

It was the speaker on the tape, not Daschle, who said, 'The evil ones now find themselves in crisis, and this is God's will for them.' The only solution for Iraq was for 'the zealous Iraqi sons, who ran its affairs and brought it out of backwardness ... to return ... to run its affairs anew,' the speaker on the tape said, referring to the Baath leadership."
—Cleveland's *The Plain Dealer*, November 18 ■



OUT OF ALIGNMENT

Candidate: Joe Lieberman
Category: General Likeability
Grade: C

For a Republican, John McCain has quite a following among Democrats—especially those running for president. John Kerry and John Edwards have often tried to align themselves with the Arizona senator, sponsoring legislation with him and dropping his name during interviews. But now Joe Lieberman has taken his McCain identification to a whole new level: He's making it the centerpiece of his New Hampshire primary strategy.

Last week, the Lieberman campaign unveiled a new TV ad touting endorsements from seven Granite State independents who voted for McCain in New Hampshire's 2000 Republican primary. "Something's happening," the ad's announcer intones. "McCain supporters are backing Joe Lieberman." Lieberman and McCain, the voters in the ad tell the cameras, are two peas in a pod—"straight-talkers" who "vote their own conscience." And, just in case McCain's New Hampshire fans miss the ad, the Lieberman campaign has sent a mailing to 30,000 of them asking for their support.

The strategy probably makes sense for Lieberman. After all, his support for the Iraq war and his initial refusal to vote against the GOP Medicare bill haven't endeared him to his party's rank and file. And, since independents—who helped McCain win the 2000 GOP primary in New Hampshire—can vote in the Democratic primary, Lieberman is wise to seek their votes. But there's something a little desperate about Lieberman's latest attempt to ride McCain's coattails. Wasn't pledging to make McCain his secretary of Defense enough?—Jason Zengerle

RECORD SPIN

Candidate: Dick Gephardt
Category: Intellectual Honesty
Grade: D

Dick Gephardt has launched a disciplined, well-defined attack that uses Howard Dean's past rhetoric to highlight a very real (and important) difference between the two candidates—namely, that Dean puts greater emphasis on balancing the budget, even if it means sacrificing spending priorities, while Gephardt will abandon fiscal conservatism if he can fund sweeping health care reform.

But, lately, Gephardt has taken the attacks too far, accusing Dean of compassionless budget-cutting. At the debate last week, Gephardt said, "He cut Medicaid. He cut the prescription-drug program. He tried to eliminate it three times in the mid-'90s." Some of these details are technically correct, but Dean's overall record when it comes to health care generally, and Medicaid specifically, is about as good as it gets in U.S. politics these days. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, from 1991 to 2001—a period that roughly matches Dean's tenure as governor—Medicaid spending in Vermont rose by 13 percent, two points more than the national average. Moreover, Vermont's program was generous in the first place, making the increase more impressive than that of other, stingier states with similar percentage increases. Dean deserves a lot of the credit for this, which is why the Dean campaign obtained health care testimonials from both Al Gore and Bill Clinton. And, if that doesn't convince you, take it from Families USA President Ron Pollack, Washington's leading liberal advocate on health care access issues, who said in January that Dean "walks the walk. He doesn't just talk the talk. He has a very distinguished record as Vermont's governor on health care." —Jonathan Cohn

LIGHTS OUT

Candidate: Howard Dean
Category: Intellectual Honesty
Grade: D

For all his outspokenness, there are some things that Howard Dean apparently doesn't want to talk about. Before he left office last January, the Vermont governor stuck a ten-year seal on his public papers and correspondence, sending them to a warehouse in a remote part of the state. This reveals a major amount of chutzpah. Dean has relentlessly bludgeoned the president and his men for their tendency toward furtiveness. At the time of the *l'affaire yellowcake*, he bellowed, "Mister President, the time for evasiveness, secrecy, contradictory statements, and ducking responsibility is over."

Dean avoids an F for his own transgressions because he's at least more honest than the administration. Where the Bushies hide behind high-minded claims of executive prerogative, Team Dean admits its motives. As the candidate himself told Vermont Public Radio, "We didn't want anything embarrassing appearing in the papers at a critical time." Now that's class.
—Franklin Foer

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CARICATURES BY ZACH TRENHOLM

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A do-nothing Korea policy.

Look Away

BY JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S internecine squabbles over Iraq policy have gotten a lot of press, but no issue has divided its foreign policy team more than North Korea. For two years, engagers (who generally favor using diplomacy to get Pyongyang to give up its nuclear program) and hawks (who are suspicious of negotiations and believe rewarding North Korean leader Kim Jong Il could encourage other proliferators) were unable to resolve their differences. "It's as stark as stark could be—we weren't even on the same page," says one American official. But, in recent months, this chasm supposedly has narrowed. Now, administration spokespeople say, hawks and moderates have come together, throwing their weight behind multilateral negotiations with Pyongyang, which involve the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia. This internal unity, they say, has finally allowed the United States to present one face to the world and win them over. "The U.S. has worked patiently to build international consensus ... in the case of North Korea," a State Department statement claimed. "The North Koreans know that a strategy of divide and conquer is no longer an option," national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said in late October. And the media has picked up on these claims. As *The New York Times* reported last month, "President Bush has declared that his administration is making great progress in its diplomatic effort to disarm" North Korea.

If only. In truth, if there's any consensus within the administration, it's not about how to make progress but how to avoid it. The divisions on how to handle the North remain. Only now, to advance their contradictory agendas, engagers, hawks, and Bush's domestic political advisers are all outwardly supporting the multilateral talks—while simultaneously undercutting the negotiations to ensure they go nowhere. "There's a confluence of people who support do-nothing talks" that serve a purpose other than their stated goal—getting the Koreans to give up their weapons—says one official. Meanwhile, North Korea continues to work on its weapons program. "Every day we waste, we've got one foot in the grave," says the official.

NORTH KOREA HAS been a contentious issue since early in the Bush administration. In early 2001, Bush ordered a review of the Clinton administration's engagement policy, which had utilized bilateral negotiations in an attempt to prevent the North from building missiles and potentially developing nuclear weapons. Hawks argue that Secretary of State Colin Powell jumped the gun in trying to influence that review. Though Bush had not committed to keeping the Clinton policy, on the eve of a visit to Washington by South Korean President Kim Dae Jung in March 2001 Powell announced that the United States would engage the North and "pick up where President Clinton and his administration left off." But, when Kim Dae Jung arrived in Washington, Bush scoffed at the South Korean president's engagement efforts.

Meanwhile, engagers blamed the hawks for pressuring Bush to scuttle the Clinton policy, and battle lines were drawn. The result was a stalemate. "The administration spent two years dithering on North Korea," says a former State Department official, continuing to do nothing even after the North admitted having an illegal uranium-enrichment program in October 2002. Hard-liners, led by Vice President Dick Cheney and Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton, insisted regime change was the only way to deal with the threat from Pyongyang. Engagers, led by Powell and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Jim Kelly, believed dialogue had some chance of working. According to officials, each side began bringing as many people as possible to Korea policy meetings to tip the balance in their favor. One Korea expert says that, when engagers seemed to progress toward negotiations with the North, hard-liners would publicly undercut them with deliberately provocative statements about the North Korean regime. For their part, hawks say, engagers wanted to offer carrots to Kim Jong Il no matter how badly Pyongyang behaved.

This spring, North Korea's behavior became even more dangerous. As Nicholas Eberstadt, a Korea-watcher at the American Enterprise Institute, notes in a forthcoming book, in April North Korean official Li Gun took Kelly aside at a meeting in Beijing and nonchalantly informed him the North possessed nukes and might be willing to sell them to other nations. As the story goes, this worsening situation united the Bush administration, prompting all sides to see the urgent need for tough, fruitful talks with the North. The first full round of multilateral talks was held in August, with more negotiations originally set for December. In October, Bush for the first time announced that the United States, in conjunction with allies, would be willing to provide North Korea with a written security guarantee in exchange for verifiable nuclear disarmament—a significant shift from his previous insistence that the North had to fully dismantle its nuclear program before any kind of security deal could be reached.

But, in reality, the base of support inside the U.S. government for the talks is narrow. Many hard-liners think that if the talks break down their tougher policies will triumph. The hawks, says one administration official, "are going to give [Powell] enough rope to hang himself on." (When I asked which hawks would serve as hangmen, he smiled devilishly and made a motion like he was waxing a mustache; Bolton wears a thick, bushy mustache.) When I

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asked one hard-liner whether he favored the ongoing multilateral dialogue, he answered bluntly: "Nothing can convince Kim Jong Il to give up his weapons. ... It's too late now—North Korea has internalized that they have nukes." Instead, the official said, hard-liners are convinced that, in the aftermath of failed talks, American allies in Asia will embrace sterner measures toward the North, including sanctioning Pyongyang at the U.N. Security Council and working harder to cut off flows of funds to Kim Jong Il's regime. Failed talks might allow the military option to remain on the table. "You want your representatives [of your allies] to think you've tried any other options before you go to war," explains Eberstadt. In fact, though few in the Pentagon relish the idea of a confrontation with Pyongyang, one administration official says, "We should say more clearly that we're prepared for [military] contingencies on the peninsula." According to reports this summer in *U.S. News and World Report*, the Department of Defense has ordered American military commanders to develop an aggressive new war plan for a possible conflict with North Korea.

Similarly, many engagers have not put their full weight behind the multilateral talks because, like the hawks, they believe that failure will force a return to the approach they favored from the start. For the engagers, that means direct negotiations between the United States and North Korea. "The engagers see this as the first step to sending Powell to Pyongyang" for bilateral talks like Madeleine Albright's 2000 negotiations with Kim Jong Il, says one official. "Engagers think multilateral is a way to break through to bilateral."

All sides are working to ensure that the multilateral discussions go nowhere. Some engagers, say officials, "set up the very fact of having a meeting as a success" without insisting that it address difficult issues—to set the table for a move to bilateral negotiations, which they see as the only way to solve the crisis. As a result, engagers help the North Koreans believe they can focus on process, rather than results, an approach that could keep going forever.

Hard-liners are undermining the talks as well. One former Korea policymaker says hawks are trying to influence the writing of the security guarantee that the United States might deliver to Pyongyang, making it too flimsy, so the North Koreans won't accept it. What's more, hawks have been trying to limit the negotiating leeway Kelly has in his talks with the North, preventing him from engaging in a substantive back-and-forth. "The negotiators will have limited latitude in their talks. ... In terms of direct bilateral talks with North Korea in a pull-aside [on the sidelines of multilateral talks], absolutely no," one hard-liner admits. Indeed, says one top former official, the negotiating instructions that Kelly received before talks earlier this year "were extraordinarily restrictive." After each side had read their prepared statements, the official says, North Korean negotiator Li Gun told Kelly that he had four questions for him about the U.S. position. Kelly could respond only by reading the prepared statement again. "[I]f Kelly doesn't come in with more latitude [in the next round of talks], then he'll fail," says one former policymaker.

Meanwhile, according to several administration players, Bush's political shop doesn't want the multilateral talks to succeed either. Although the politicos are in favor of some limited dialogue with the North—to make it seem as though the White House is doing *something*—they don't want the talks to develop into serious negotiations, because they want to keep Korea, unpredictable and dangerous, largely out of the media until after the 2004 elections. If the talks were to become serious, involving lengthy dialogue with the North Koreans over their nuclear program, the famously hard-line North Koreans might threaten the United States or test a nuke to increase their negotiating leverage—stunts that could terrify the American electorate. "For political people, a success is keeping [Korea] off the front pages of the papers. ... They want to put it in a box until after the election," says one official. Not surprisingly, then, *The Washington Post* reported this week that the scheduled December talks may be postponed until 2004.

WHILE THE UNITED STATES constructs its facade of policy, North Korea continues to work on its weapons programs. In early November, *The New York Times* reported that the CIA now believes Pyongyang has "mastered the technology of turning its nuclear fuel into functioning weapons" and that intelligence officers think the North has more than the one or two nukes it was previously estimated to possess. And, in recent weeks, North Korean officials have more explicitly threatened to detonate one of their nuclear devices.

A test could cause chaos in Northeast Asia, but even that might not snap the Bush administration out of its do-little approach. In fact, several Korea specialists warn, Powell and other officials might play down a test by simply saying that the United States already knew North Korea had nukes. "The Bush administration has said internally [but not to the media] ... that a North Korean nuclear test will not cause Bush to call it a crisis," says one former official. But a test would confirm that the North is producing numerous devices, because it would be loath to waste bombs on a test if it only had one or two. Worse, proliferation experts note that no country has ever given up their nukes after conducting a test. The United States needs at least a "standstill" policy designed to buy time and prevent the North from building up its arsenal and testing while talks continue, says Richard Haass, the State Department director of policy planning until last summer and now president of the Council on Foreign Relations. "One big mistake the Clintons made and that we could make is assuming time is on our side," agrees an administration official. North Korea may already be using spent fuel it reprocessed this year to make more nukes. And, the official says, Pyongyang is "burrowing away at building a [longer-range missile]." If that's the case, our time is already running out. ■

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The Medicare law's true cost.

Careless

BY JONATHAN COHN

PERHAPS THE MOST hopeful sign about the Medicare reform law President Bush signed this week is the fact that it has so many Republicans in a tizzy. "I didn't come here to create the largest expansion of Medicare in history," protests Arizona Representative Jeff Flake. "If we veer off the path of the limited government of Ronald Reagan, it will be at our peril," warns Indiana Representative Mike Pence.

But conservative critics give Bush and his allies far too little credit. While the reform law certainly expands government—to the tune of $400 billion over the first ten years—its fundamental purpose is to realize a cherished conservative goal: transforming Medicare into a loosely regulated voucher system in which private companies, not the federal government, do the actual insuring. No less an authority on right-wing dogma than Newt Gingrich said as much in a recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, calling the measure "the most important reorganization of our nation's health-care system since the original Medicare Bill of 1965."

Gingrich's enthusiastic endorsement is a big clue as to what exactly this "reorganization" entails. Back in the 1990s, after all, he spoke openly of letting Medicare "wither on the vine." And, while Gingrich's successors may speak in sweeter tones—promising, as Bush does, to "protect" and "modernize" Medicare—it's still the same old crusade to undermine a vital social insurance program. Only this time around, it's working.

BACK IN JANUARY, when Bush first started talking seriously about Medicare reform, he was candid about his intentions: He would offer senior citizens prescription-drug coverage only if they agreed to leave the government program and accept private insurance instead. But the president's proposal provoked a harsh backlash, particularly among those senior citizens with multiple chronic conditions, who feared HMOs would force them to switch doctors or lose access to the best specialists. The outcry was so severe that even some Republicans suggested the president reconsider. And, within days, Bush seemed to do just that, promising to offer prescription-drug coverage even to those senior citizens who wanted to remain in the traditional Medicare program. His only caveat was that the drug benefit itself be administered separately, by private insurers rather than the government.

At first blush, the Bush reform law seems true to that promise, since it creates a stand-alone drug benefit available to seniors in traditional Medicare. Granted, it's not exactly a lavish plan: With a huge coverage gap that would expose all but the poorest beneficiaries to more than $3,000 in out-of-pocket costs, it's a far cry from the kind of drug coverage most non-elderly Americans have through their jobs. But the benefit offers at least modest help to people who desperately need it, and seniors won't have to abandon Medicare in order to get it.

Or will they? The way everybody is talking about the details of the new benefit—the $35 monthly premium, the 25 percent cost-sharing, and so on—you might think those numbers were set in stone. They aren't. The fine print of the Medicare law says merely that the stand-alone drug insurance must be "actuarially equivalent" to those specifications, meaning premiums and co-pays can vary from plan to plan so long as the average amount paid by beneficiaries is the same as it would be using the numbers outlined in the law. It's up to the private insurers actually administering the drug plans on behalf of the government to come up with the specifics. And that's a big problem, because it's easy to design a drug benefit that meets this requirement yet is clearly (and deliberately) unattractive to certain types of beneficiaries—namely, those likely to run up the highest drug bills.

For example, as Cristina Boccuti and Marilyn Moon argue in a recent paper for the Commonwealth Fund, a drug insurance company could cover initial drug expenses more fully and skimp on coverage for subsequent costs. From an actuarial standpoint, the overall financial effects would be the same, but the plan would be a much better deal for somebody using just a few medications (nearly everything would be covered) than for somebody using many (the coverage would run out quickly). In addition, under the new law, the drug insurance companies are free to restrict coverage to a list of drugs for which they can get big discounts. (Such lists are known as "formularies.") It's a great way to save money but also a wide-open invitation to manipulate the market. A plan determined to exclude unhealthy seniors could cover only the cheapest drug in every category, well aware that seniors with multiple chronic conditions may need to take less popular, more expensive drugs in order to avoid toxic interactions.

So, for all the talk about guaranteeing seniors a drug benefit even if they stay in Medicare, the guarantee is pretty flimsy. The seniors most likely to fear managed care—i.e., those with the most serious medical conditions—could have the hardest time finding useful stand-alone coverage. Their only option would be to leave Medicare and entrust all of their care—not just pharmaceuticals—to private managed care. Which, of course, is the very scenario that scared so many elderly people in the first place.

That's not the only way the new Medicare law favors the private sector. An even stronger inducement for seniors to adopt private plans comes from a shift in the way insurers

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get paid. Under the current arrangement, every time a senior citizen opts to join an HMO rather than stay in Medicare, the federal government pays that insurance company a fixed fee—one originally set near the average cost of insuring a senior citizen in traditional Medicare. This system, which came to be called Medicare+Choice during the Clinton years, seemed terrific for a while, since private insurers offered all sorts of goodies that Medicare didn't: catastrophic coverage, lower co-payments, and, most important, prescription-drug coverage. At one point in the mid-'90s, 16 percent of all Medicare beneficiaries had opted out of Medicare to enroll in HMOs. Most experts figured that proportion would continue to rise until HMOs were the dominant form of coverage among senior citizens. After all, if the plans were so efficient that they could offer everybody more generous benefits than Medicare for roughly the same cost, why shouldn't they take over?

But, when the Clinton administration took a closer look at the Medicare HMOs, it discovered they hadn't actually been more efficient; the government had simply been paying them too much. The private insurers were attracting primarily those people most willing to put up with managed care's restrictions on access to specialists and treatments—which, almost by definition, meant people with the least severe health problems. One study by the General Accounting Office found that the government had been paying private insurance companies 13 percent more per person than it would have cost to take care of the same person on Medicare. Subsequent studies by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission found similar rates of overpayment. (While the insurance industry strenuously disputes these studies, government statistics show that in private insurance just 84 cents of every dollar goes to actual patient care—as opposed to 98 cents in Medicare—in part because insurers must spend lavishly on marketing and show profits that will impress the stock market.)

Confronted with these facts, the Clinton administration took the obvious remedial action: It stopped paying the plans more than they deserved. Lo and behold, the insurance companies suddenly couldn't afford to offer such generous benefits. Today, nearly a third of Medicare+Choice plans offer no drug coverage at all, while those that do offer skimpier benefits by the day: More than half cover generic drugs only; a slightly smaller proportion stop reimbursing expenses beyond $750 per year. Still other plans have simply dropped out of Medicare altogether. As a result, the percentage of Medicare beneficiaries enrolled in HMOs has dropped by about a third, to 11 percent.

One sensible response to this experience would be to recognize that perhaps private insurance isn't worth the effort after all. But the Bush administration has settled on a different approach: It has decided to make the private plans competitive again by giving them even *more* money. It already raised payments to private insurers through administrative actions. The new Medicare law goes even further, increasing payments to the point where Medicare may be paying some private plans an extra *30 percent* per beneficiary—i.e., well beyond the overpayments the Clinton administration eliminated—according to analysis by Medicare's own actuaries. The stock market has already taken heed of this anticipated windfall: In the two weeks after the law's details became public, at least two major insurers who take Medicare beneficiaries saw their stocks rise significantly: Humana's by 7 percent and PacifiCare's by 15 percent.

On top of this, if all goes as planned, in 2010 the newly revitalized managed care industry will get a chance to flex its muscle in a carefully constructed experiment. In six communities selected by the federal government, senior citizens will get a voucher good for buying coverage from traditional Medicare or a private insurance plan. But, unlike in the current system, Medicare and the private plans will each bid for business, offering not just different benefits but different premiums. If seniors choose more expensive options, they'll have to pay the difference between the voucher and the premium; if they choose the cheaper options, they'll get the difference as a cash rebate. It's a test run of a system called "premium support," an idea health policy experts have been debating for years.

Conservatives expect these experiments will prove the inherent superiority of private insurance—and, thus, the wisdom of premium support as a model for Medicare. But the experiments are unlikely to prove anything. Given that the private insurers attract healthy seniors who cost less to insure, they'll have a built-in advantage allowing them to undercut Medicare's premiums, offer better benefits, or both. That's not a fair competition designed to show whether government-run insurance can keep up with the private alternative; it's a rigged contest designed to lure healthy seniors into private plans and leave sick ones in an increasingly overburdened Medicare.

If that's not enough, the new law contains at least one other egregious attempt to undermine Medicare: It hastens the arrival of a financial shortfall that could make it easier for Washington to cut health care spending for seniors. In part, the law does this simply by using Medicare funds injudiciously, whether it's on those unfair subsidies to the insurance industry or on tax breaks to encourage the use of dedicated health savings accounts. But, to make matters even worse, the law sets a new standard for Medicare "insolvency." Currently, Medicare consists of two separate programs, each with its own funding source. Medicare Part A, which covers inpatient hospital expenses, gets its money primarily from a trust fund financed by payroll taxes. Medicare Part B, which covers doctor visits and other outpatient services, gets its money primarily from general tax revenue. Under the new law, if the actuaries responsible for Medicare determine for two years in a row that general revenue makes up more than 45 percent of the total Medicare budget, the program will be declared "insolvent," requiring Congress to either cut benefits or raise payroll taxes—both of which would affect

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low-income people disproportionately.

It's important to note that the law does not limit *overall* Medicare spending; it merely insists that general revenue not make up too great a proportion. That's a particularly perverse idea because the best way for Medicare to become more efficient is to reduce expensive hospital stays, which means spending less money from Part A and more from Part B, which in turn means relying more heavily on general revenue. In other words, the more efficient Medicare becomes, the closer it comes to this trumped-up fiscal "crisis."

ALL OF THIS raises the question: If private-sector reforms like the one Bush signed won't actually make Medicare more efficient, why are they so popular with conservatives? One common argument is that a system of competing private plans will eventually result in lower overall spending than would be politically possible under the current, centralized government system. It's an intuitively attractive argument that, once again, is completely inconsistent with the facts. During the early and mid-'90s, private health insurance indeed reduced spending while Medicare's costs soared. But, since the late '90s, the exact opposite has happened. Private insurance costs have soared while Medicare has held spending closer to inflation.

So, if you want to find an intellectually honest motive for the right's attraction to Medicare reform, you have to look somewhere else: to ideology. As a matter of philosophy, conservatives just don't like the idea of having society as a whole bear a collective burden for the health care of seniors—particularly when the system does so by dictating prices across the private sector or dictating equal benefits to individuals. They'd much rather allow the marketplace to settle on prices with no regulation, with each provider driving different bargains. To Medicare's defenders, of course, universalism is the program's most glorious virtue; to its detractors, it is the program's most offensive flaw.

In fairness, there are respectable reasons to consider giving private insurance a greater role in Medicare—like the possibility that transferring more medical costs to consumers might discourage frivolous (and potentially dangerous) overtreatment. But, even if you think the need to impose this sort of discipline warrants the sort of radical makeover the Bush reforms contemplate, you must go about it with extraordinary caution. The more you have consumers shop around for cheaper health plans, the more you risk leaving the very sick stuck paying ever-higher costs for their own coverage, thereby eroding the very basis of insurance—the idea that the healthy must help subsidize care for the sick. When you're dealing with senior citizens, the sickest of whom depend upon Medicare's freedom to maintain long-term relationships with multiple specialists, you could easily make the program unsustainable.

The only way to avoid this "Medicare death spiral" is to regulate private insurance vigorously. And that, unsurprisingly, is something the Bush reform declines to do. For all of its 600-odd pages, the law is thin on new regulations designed to thwart insurance plans from gaming the system. What's more, the Bush administration has shown no interest in getting tough with health care industries, particularly those that donate heavily to Republican political campaigns. Quite the contrary, the Medicare bill itself is a case study in the extent to which the administration is willing to coddle its political financiers—whether it's protecting the pharmaceutical industry from government-bargaining leverage or pumping up the health insurance industry with subsidies far and above what they deserve. That's why even Henry Aaron, the esteemed Brookings Institution economist who has proposed his own premium-support model for Medicare, thinks the Bush law could be a disaster. "There are various ways to reduce the likelihood [of the Medicare death spiral]," Aaron wrote on the eve of the final vote. "Unfortunately, the conference committee proposal provides no such safeguards, rendering the committee proposal too risky to adopt." He was absolutely right. What a shame Congress didn't listen. ■

Jerusalem Dispatch

Fantasy

BY MICHAEL B. OREN AND YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

SOME TWO MILLION Israeli homes recently received in the mail the 47-page text of the Geneva Accord, which claims to be the comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Accord, a European-funded effort secretly negotiated by Palestinian officials and Israeli public figures for two years—and signed in a symbolic, lavish ceremony in Geneva this week—states that Israel will withdraw to the 1967 borders, a Palestinian state will emerge with its capital in Jerusalem, and the two peoples will recognize each other's right to statehood and resolve the refugee issue. Though its formulators insist that the Accord is merely a proposal by private citizens, the text is presented as a "permanent-status agreement" between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), complete with highly detailed articles and color-coded maps. In his introduction to the Hebrew version, renowned novelist David Grossman assured Israeli citizens, "who have withstood innumerable wars and horrible terrorist attacks," that the Accord will produce a "thriving and ... egalitarian" Israel, freed "from the fear of war and annihilation."

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For Israelis, exhausted after three years of terrorism, Grossman's words are seductive. Indeed, the Geneva Accord coincides with an historic transformation in Israeli public opinion. Most Israelis are now ready to forfeit the results of the 1967 war—control over the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem—in return for Palestinian acceptance of the outcome of the 1948 war. Most Israelis also view the creation of a Palestinian state not as a mortal threat but as the only means of preserving Israel's Jewish and democratic identity. In 1992, a year before the beginning of the Oslo peace process, Labor's Yitzhak Rabin was elected prime minister on a platform that negated Palestinian statehood; today, the Likud's Ariel Sharon routinely declares his acceptance of an independent Palestine. For Israel, then, the question is no longer whether to create a Palestinian state, but how.

The centrist Israeli majority supports establishing a Palestinian state, but only after the Palestinians have ended terrorism, reformed their government, and renounced their insistence on returning Palestinian refugees to Israel. The Accord, though, ignores even those minimal expectations. Instead, it would grant the Palestinians a state while they wage a terrorist war, legitimize and even strengthen Yasir Arafat's rule, and force Israel to accept the principle of repatriating refugees. In addition, it undermines the global war on terrorism and would threaten any future compromise in the region.

If there's a fundamental gap between the expectations of the Israeli majority and the fantasy of Geneva, it's because the architects of Geneva aren't part of that majority. The Geneva leader, Yossi Beilin, was voted out of the Knesset precisely because of his central role in the failed Oslo process. Other signatories include politicians Amram Mitzna, Avraham Burg, and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, all of whom tried and failed to achieve national office. This creates a fundamental asymmetry between Geneva's Israeli negotiators and their Palestinian counterparts, most of them Fatah and Tanzim officials acting with Arafat's blessings.

Most Israelis have long since lost any faith in the willingness of Arafat's regime to uphold any agreement with Israel. Under Oslo, the Palestinian Authority (P.A.) pledged to refrain from incitement, actively combat terrorism, limit the weaponry in its arsenal, and peacefully resolve all disputes with Israel. Instead, it has educated a generation of Palestinian youth to revere suicide bombers, actively abetted terrorism, smuggled in tens of thousands of illegal weapons, and responded to Israel's peace offers with a war that has killed or wounded thousands on both sides.

The Geneva Accord, however, pretends that the last three years never happened. Absurdly, Geneva again invites the Palestinians to commit themselves to combat terrorism, refrain from incitement, limit the weapons in their arsenal, and accept the permanence of Israel. In contrast to Oslo, though, which was a process of stages in which the Palestinians had to fulfill the agreement to receive a state, this time the Palestinians get their state first and only later have to prove good faith.

Not only does Geneva ignore the collapse of Palestinian credibility; it denies Israel the means to defend itself. While even Oslo gave Israeli security forces the right of hot pursuit against terrorists, Geneva would place Israel's security in the hands of a multinational force composed of contingents from the "U.S., the Russian Federation, the EU, the U.N., and other parties." The force would be charged with monitoring Palestinian compliance with the Accord, patrolling borders, and preventing terrorist attacks and arms-smuggling. Israel and Palestine would have the right to assent to the force, but the Accord is unclear on whether the two parties can veto the countries providing monitors. Consequently, given international pressure on Israel, can anyone imagine it being able to veto the participation of, say, France and Belgium?

Worse, Israel's experience with such multinational forces is hardly encouraging. Beginning in 1949, border disputes were supposed to be resolved by joint Arab-Israeli committees under the U.N.'s aegis. But these committees proved powerless to prevent terrorist incursions into Israel, and their failure helped precipitate the 1956 Sinai War. U.N. peacekeeping forces placed in Sinai after that conflict were summarily evicted by Egypt in May 1967, triggering the Six Day War. More recently, U.N. observer forces in Lebanon have failed to prevent Hezbollah attacks against Israel and have even been implicated in the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers. (Israel's history does offer two examples of successful international peacekeeping: on the Golan Heights after the 1973 War and in Sinai after the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty in 1979; in both cases, though, success has depended on the Syrian and Egyptian determination to maintain a quiet border.) Yet the Geneva Accords would resurrect the failed 1949 model of joint committees and entrust Israel's security to international peacekeepers.

Given the record of the Palestinians and of international monitors, two scenarios would be likely. One is that terrorists would operate from behind the backs of the international force, provoking an Israeli response and triggering a clash between Israel and the monitors. The other is that the monitors themselves would attempt to suppress terrorism and become targets for attack, leading to their evacuation. There are ample precedents for both scenarios—from clashes between Israel and U.N. forces in Lebanon to the recent flight of U.N. personnel from Baghdad. It is in anticipation of these scenarios that Arafat has made the internationalization of the conflict his stated goal.

One would have expected the Israeli negotiators of the Geneva Accord to recognize that unprecedented Israeli concessions would require even more stringent security guarantees. Geneva does allow for Israeli-operated early warning stations in the West Bank, though the threat of an invasion from the east has disappeared since the fall of Saddam Hussein. But, against the far more serious security threat posed by an independent Palestine, Geneva offers

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provisions that even a country with benign neighbors would find daunting. The threat to Israel's security is compounded in Jerusalem. Under Oslo, the resolution of Jerusalem's status was postponed until the end of the process, after the parties had presumably developed the mutual trust necessary for jointly governing the city. Geneva, by contrast, ignores the trust-building stage and within 30 months would award the Palestinians sovereignty over most of the Old City, including the "Al Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount Compound." Consequently, worshippers on their way to the Western Wall would have to pass through Palestinian territory, where their safety would be entrusted to a "Multinational Presence," which could include members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and to Palestinian goodwill—a questionable benevolence given that Palestinian leaders, from Arafat to Ikrima Sabri, the Haram's mufti, have repeatedly denied the Jewish connection to Jerusalem and its holy sites. The tunnels along the Western Wall would be under Israeli control but Palestinian sovereignty, leaving unclear how any dispute over the tunnels would be resolved.

However acute, the dangers to Israel's security are overshadowed by Geneva's threat to Israel's continued existence as a Jewish state. The architects of Geneva have assured the Israeli public that the Palestinian participants have renounced the demand for the return of refugees to pre-1967 Israel. Yet even a cursory reading of the Accord belies this claim. There is no explicit renunciation of the right of return. So, while Israel is to tangibly repudiate its claim to Greater Israel by removing settlements, the Palestinians under Geneva aren't even obliged to verbally renounce their claim to Greater Palestine. "The assertion that the Accord cancels the right of return ... is inaccurate," Palestinian signatory Jamal Zaqout recently wrote. "It was spread by Israeli figures trying to make the document more palatable to Israelis." Zaqout is correct: The Accord cites both the Saudi peace plan for the Middle East and U.N. resolution 194, both of which say that refugees should return to Israel. So, while the Accord does recognize "the right of the Jewish people to statehood" (without saying that Israel is the fulfillment of that right), that concession is effectively nullified by the implicit endorsement of the right of return, which would make Jewish statehood untenable.

Beyond declarations, however, Geneva provides a mechanism for threatening Israel's demographic integrity. The number of refugees to be absorbed by Israel would reflect the average number admitted by third-party countries—Western and Arab—but no ceiling is set. In principle, Israel would retain the right to control the number of returning Palestinians. In practice, though, having already conceded the moral legitimacy of return, Israel could be exposed to international pressure to accept massive numbers of refugees. Similarly, the failure of Geneva to limit Israel's compensation to the refugees—Palestinians demand up to $600 billion—would leave Israel vulnerable to extortion. Overall, granting the international community responsibility for Israel's borders and a say in refugees means abrogating Israeli sovereignty. No other country in history has ever been expected to voluntarily submit to this extent of international control.

Not surprisingly, careful readers of the Geneva text, among them Gilead Sher, a former chief negotiator with the Palestinians, have concluded that the Accord would be a defeat for Israel on nearly every count. Under Geneva, no Jew could remain in the Palestinian state, but Palestinians could live in both Israel and Palestine. Palestinian refugees would be compensated, but the even larger numbers of Jewish refugees from Arab countries aren't even mentioned. Israel represents only its own citizens, and not the Jewish people, while the PLO represents "the Palestinian people," presumably everywhere—even in Israel. And, while the Accord would require Israel to pay Palestine for damages caused by the settlements, the Palestinians are forgiven any debts for decades of terrorism. In fact, the Accord adopts the Palestinian perspective on nearly every key issue. It accepts the Palestinian definition of the Temple Mount as an exclusive Islamic possession, of East Jerusalem's Jewish neighborhoods as "settlements," and of U.N. Resolution 242 as mandating Israel's return to the 1967 borders. It implies acceptance of the Palestinian narrative on the origins of the refugee problem. Tellingly, the Accord devotes obsessive detail to restrictions imposed on Israel—from yielding a Christian cemetery in West Jerusalem, to the number of hours allotted Israel to complain to foreign monitors—yet it becomes vague when dealing with Palestinian obligations like curtailing terrorism and incitement.

IF IMPLEMENTED, GENEVA would not only be disastrous for Israel but also fatal to America's Middle East policies. The United States has championed a two-pronged policy of waging war on terrorism and promoting democracy. In advocating the road map, the Bush administration made the suppression of terrorism a prerequisite for the creation of a Palestinian state. That was a revolution in America's peacemaking strategy. If, in the past, Israel were required to relinquish territory before receiving peace, now the Palestinians would first have to demonstrate peaceful intent before acquiring territory.

Geneva undermines these objectives by rewarding terrorism, compromising democratic norms, and strengthening dictatorial rule. Consider the trajectory of concessions offered by the Israeli left. At the Camp David talks in 2000, the Barak government proffered 92 percent of the West Bank. When the Palestinians rejected that offer and responded with terrorism, Ehud Barak proceeded to up the offer to 96 percent. When that, too, was rejected and terrorism intensified, a part of the Israeli left proceeded to negotiate what became the Geneva Accord, which is willing to forfeit all of the territories, the Temple Mount, the ability of Israel to defend itself, and Israel's inviolate opposition to the Palestinians' right of return. The trajectory was not lost on Mamdouh Nowfal, Arafat's military adviser, who told Jordan's *Al Rai*, "What was proposed at Taba was better than what was proposed at Camp David, but what was

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proposed at Geneva is twice the progress."

This progression of concessions negates America's efforts to prove that terrorism doesn't work and to democratize the region. Under Geneva, the Palestinians would win immeasurable gains from their terrorism campaign. And, at a time when American forces are arresting terrorists around the world, thousands of Palestinian terrorists would be released from Israeli jails. What's more, the Accord undercuts democratic norms in the only country in the Middle East that upholds them. The Sharon government was elected in a landslide victory to pursue a policy fundamentally incompatible with Geneva. The losers of that election are now trying to circumvent the electoral process and, together with the P.A., impose their will by summoning international pressure for the Accord in order to delegitimize the Sharon government. The Accord further denies a basic democratic choice—of citizenship—to more than 200,000 Palestinians and several thousand Armenians in Jerusalem who, though they hold Israeli identity cards, are to be placed without their consent under Palestinian rule. Finally, by discarding the U.S. demand for Palestinian reform as a prerequisite for statehood, Geneva deprives the Palestinians of the hope for democracy.

Arafat, for one, certainly realizes that Geneva would destroy the road map, with its stipulation for ending terrorism and implementing reform. "Does this mean that the Geneva Accord is making the road map irrelevant now?" asked Hussein Hejazi, a media adviser to the P.A.'s foreign ministry, on October 18. "The answer is yes. ... Bush's or Sharon's involvement ... is becoming irrelevant to a permanent solution." Yet some American officials don't seem to understand this. Colin Powell, for one, plans to meet this week with the signers of the Accord. One can understand why frustrated Israeli opposition politicians, along with Palestinians and Europeans intent on hobbling U.S. policy, would champion Geneva. Why the American secretary of state would do so is inexplicable.

Watching Monday's festive ceremony celebrating the signing of the accord in Geneva by some of Israel's leading intellectuals and artists—a ceremony that included messages of support from Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and other luminaries—we wished we could have shared in the celebration. We, too, as terror-sick Israelis and parents of children in national service, are not immune to the allure of Geneva. From our office window, we overlook Café Hillel, site of Jerusalem's last suicide bombing. No one needs to remind us that peace is worth painful sacrifices.

Yet we believe that Geneva will bring the opposite of peace by making future compromise even more difficult: Based on every precedent, Arafat can be expected to pocket the Accord's concessions and proceed to the next round of terror-backed demands. Finally, given the Arab world's immersion in anti-Semitism, its simultaneous denial of and approval of the Holocaust, and its routine portrayal of the Jewish state as demonic, the notion that the Middle East can sustain a comprehensive agreement at this time may be Geneva's ultimate delusion.

Geneva is the product of Israelis who have forgotten how to defend their nation's most basic interests. That was reinforced at the Geneva signing, where Carter blamed the conflict almost entirely on Israel, Palestinians denounced the occupation, and Israelis in attendance spoke only of their hope for peace, without mentioning the Palestinians' violent rejection of the Israeli left's peace offer three years ago. Worse, the Geneva Israelis seem to have lost faith in their country's future and believe, as Avraham Burg wrote in his recent article "A FAILED ISRAELI SOCIETY," that the country is "collapsing like a cheap Jerusalem wedding hall."

But we see an Israeli society that has heroically withstood terrorism aimed at demoralizing us and forcing us to sacrifice our most vital national interests. That is precisely what the negotiators of Geneva have done—signed on a document of surrender. After providing the world with an example of strength in the face of terrorism, there is no reason now for Israel to concede defeat. ■

Campaign Journal

Mapquest

BY RYAN LIZZA

THERE'S NO SUCH thing as a harmless mistake in Iowa these days. Four presidential aspirants—John Kerry, John Edwards, Dick Gephardt, and Howard Dean—are competing to win, place, or show in the state's January 19 Democratic caucuses; one of the quartet will finish out of the money and, in all likelihood, out of the presidential race soon after. With the stakes so high, any slipup could prove disastrous. And, with the state crawling with political operatives and political reporters—taking up every seat on planes, filling up every available hotel—every mistake tends to get noticed. Like idle remarks spoken a little too loudly, as some Kerry advisers learned in late November when a conversation they had in the bar of the Hotel Fort Des Moines—in which they bemoaned Kerry's inability to catch up to Dean and mused about whether their man should make more campaign appearances on a

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motorcycle—found its way onto the *Drudge Report*.

Even a wrongly dialed phone number can have embarrassing consequences, as another Kerry aide recently discovered when he called room 541 at the Renaissance Savery in Des Moines to speak to Michael Whouley. Whouley, a renowned—and famously press-shy—political operative, had been dispatched to Iowa by Kerry to turn around the senator's flagging campaign. So, when the governor of Iowa, Tom Vilsack, agreed to have a sit-down with Whouley, a Kerry aide urgently rang up room 541 to leave a voice-mail message. "Michael," the man with a Boston accent said breathlessly, "Vilsack wants to meet tonight." The only problem was that Michael Whouley wasn't staying in room 541. I was.

Subsequent reporting confirmed that, despite the mix-up, Whouley and the governor did have their meeting on November 24. Vilsack, whose aides are not shy about promoting him for vice president, has yet to endorse any of the primary contenders. His blessing, along with the organizational muscle it would provide, would be a coup for any candidate. According to Democratic sources, the veep slot as well as Cabinet posts were raised in Whouley and Vilsack's meeting. Kerry's Iowa press secretary, Laura Capps, insists, "It was just a friendly chat about the campaign." In any event, Whouley left the meeting without a firm commitment from the governor.

That's pretty much how it's going for Kerry in Iowa. Operating on the theory that the only way not to get crushed in New Hampshire on January 27 is not to get crushed in Iowa the week before, Kerry is investing a huge amount of time and money in the state. But there isn't much evidence it's paying off. On Monday, I catch up with the senator at a "Women for Kerry" event in Cedar Rapids. Aides are distributing a press release documenting Kerry's recent "momentum" in Iowa. The big news? Kerry has picked up the endorsements of two Iowa state representatives in the two weeks since he unveiled his "Real Deal" message at the Jefferson-Jackson dinner, an annual party fund-raiser.

Watching Kerry, I get the sense that his fall from front-runner to long shot has broken his confidence. Stuck in third place in Iowa for months, he now tries hard to curtail his senatorial speaking style, which has received poor reviews. At one point, he begins a sentence on how to bring jobs back to the United States by noting, "It's going to be a multi—." But "multifaceted" seems to be one of those words he's supposed to avoid, the kind a Beltway legislator uses when revising and extending his remarks on the Senate floor. He pauses and then starts over: "There are several parts to how you deal with the future in terms of jobs."

As his advisers' overheard discussion suggested, much of Kerry's energy these days is devoted to convincing his audience that voting for Dean—who leads in most recent polls here—would be an historic mistake. "We have to offer not just anger; we have to offer answers. We have to have offer not just slogans, but solutions," Kerry tells the crowd in Cedar Rapids. "So I say to you in Iowa, with all due respect, but with a plea, on January 19, when you go to those caucuses, don't just send them a message; send them a president!" Kerry's plea has more than a whiff of desperation to it. But why not? Nothing else has worked.

INSTEAD OF BOARDING the Real Deal Express for a trip across the state, I decide to head an hour south and catch up with John Edwards at the home of Verl Lekwa in the tiny meatpacking town of Columbus Junction. Lekwa, a retired history teacher, is a tall guy with a white beard and shaved upper lip who looks like a thinner C. Everett Koop. While we're waiting for Edwards in his upstairs office, he whispers a secret: "I'm a Republican." He did vote for Al Gore in 2000, he explains, but that was a special case. For years, his mom was a small-dollar Republican donor, and, after she died in 1999, the party continued to mail her fund-raising appeals. Lekwa wrote back that his mom was dead and therefore unable to contribute, but the requests kept coming. Finally, he warned the GOP fund-raisers that, if his late mother received one more letter asking for money, Lekwa would vote for Gore. Sure enough, another one showed up in his mailbox, and Lekwa made good on his promise. "What I said to them was, 'If you can't run a mailing list, you can't run a country,' " he tells me. Though he is considering voting for George W. Bush this time around, he didn't object when his wife, a Democrat, asked to host Edwards in their house.

While we wait for the candidate to show up, Lekwa shows me the results of years of research he has conducted on Iowa. He unfurls a large, hand-drawn map of the state across his desk; it is dotted with hundreds of three-digit numbers written in five different colors. Lekwa, it turns out, has visited every one of Iowa's 1,181 towns and rated them on the basis of their attractiveness. "The red ones are the top ten percent most beautiful cities," he explains, pointing to some of the 98 Iowa towns that have scored above 250 on the Lekwa scale, a formula that accounts for both natural and manmade beauty. "Then you have orange. Then you go down to the mediocre ones, which are green. Then you get to the blue ones, which are below average, and these"—he points out the purple ones with distaste—"are the ones you want to stay out of."

Though it's not intended to be, Lekwa's map is a handy way to understand the presidential race here in Iowa. Kerry and Dean spend a lot of time hitting red and orange towns, which tend to be larger, more affluent, and more liberal. Gephardt and Edwards, meanwhile, spend more time wooing downscale Democrats at the green and blue end of the scale. For instance, Kerry had started his day in the orange college-town oasis of Iowa City, then moved on to the large red city of Cedar Rapids, before ending the day in Ames, a red college town just north of Des Moines. Edwards, by contrast, is meeting with small groups of people in lots of tiny blue and green towns in the southern and western parts of the state, which tend to be poorer and more rural. (Columbus Junction, where Lekwa and I are awaiting his

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appearance, is green.) Unlike some states with just a few big population centers and nothing in between, Iowa has hundreds of these little towns scattered across it. "In the early days, they had to have a town roughly every six miles," says Lekwa. "Because you couldn't drive livestock to the railhead or to a place where they could be rendered. So you had so many of these little towns that really shouldn't have been here. Another twenty years later, they wouldn't have been here because there would have been better transportation. So that's the problem with Iowa: We have all these little towns to support, and, in a lot of them, there's no money there, no jobs, so the towns go to pieces."

This quirk of history offers Edwards a campaign strategy. Aides compare his plan to Gephardt's in 1988, when he lost Polk County—the biggest in the state and home to Des Moines—but still won the caucuses by working small rooms of voters in small towns across the state. Likewise, Edwards's events tend to be extremely small: When he arrives at Lekwa's house at five o'clock, he addresses only about two dozen people. The campaign argues that this plays to his strength, which is personal contact with voters. And, out in the less populated areas of the state, working lots of small house parties like this can have a disproportionate impact: Due to the complicated nature of the caucuses, it takes fewer caucusgoers for a candidate to win delegates in sparsely populated counties. "You get more bang for your buck in the rural areas," says an Edwards aide.

While Kerry's stump speech is a laundry list of Democratic issues, Edwards tries to wrap his proposals around a single idea. He talks about getting health insurance for kids, helping students pay for college, and assisting parents who want to buy a home or climb out of credit card debt. "It's all part of the same problem," he says, "which is the financial insecurity that so many middle-class families are facing every day."

Edwards refrains from directly attacking the front-running Dean—a clear contrast with Kerry and Gephardt, who sometimes seem to refrain from doing anything else. Still, one can't help but notice how much of Edwards's stump speech now seems a response to Dean's bludgeoning of Washington Democrats. Though Edwards voted for the war, he takes pains to remind audiences that he voted against the $87 billion in reconstruction money. Though he voted for the USA PATRIOT Act, he now says parts of it must be repealed. And, though he voted for Bush's education plan, he now criticizes not only its funding level—as many Democrats have—but the fact that failing schools get punished, the core innovation of the law. "These provisions in it that are bad have got to be changed," he told a small crowd at the Colony Village Restaurant in Amana the night before.

More than any of his rivals, Edwards is also trying to define himself as the candidate of optimism. "All of us are angry at George Bush," he told the Colony Village Restaurant audience. "I'm angry at George Bush and what he's done to our country. But it is so important to us as Democrats to present this country with a clear, positive alternative vision for America that's optimistic and uplifting. I absolutely believe that this country is on the edge of greatness right now." The idea is to provide a contrast with Dean's style but, again, without actually attacking the front-runner. This kid-gloves approach—along with Iowa poll numbers that stubbornly remain in the low single digits here—have given rise to speculation that maybe Edwards isn't really running for the top spot on the Democratic ticket anymore. In Amana, Steven Newell, a Gephardt supporter, wasn't shy about bringing up the scenario reporters have been whispering about for weeks: "I would say you are my number-one pick for vice president on the ticket," he told the North Carolina senator.

DICK GEPHARDT SHOWS up in a lot of Lekwa's green and blue towns, too. Just before Thanksgiving, for instance, he appears at a machinists' hall in Conroy, a small town in eastern Iowa. The floor of the union hall is concrete, and the walls are made of cinderblocks. An older, worn-out crowd sits in rows of metal folding chairs with "Local Lodge 1526" stenciled on the backs. If Kerry is the candidate of traditional liberals and Edwards the candidate of Clinton-style incrementalism, Gephardt—who's currently tied or a close second to Dean in most polls—is the candidate of big, old-fashioned, activist government. It's not just his mammoth health care plan ($2 trillion over the next ten years) or his unyielding defense of Social Security and Medicare. Even the Homeland Security plan he unveiled here this week ($20 billion per year) or his response to someone's suggestion that his vote on the war was politically damaging ("I don't care, because I am charged to keep you safe") suggest a philosophy that sees government as the first line of defense from the vagaries of life. "We have to do whatever it takes to keep our people safe," he tells his union hall audience. He's talking about Iraq, but he could have been talking about any of his policies.

But the issue that still gets Gephardt most animated is trade. When he ran for president in 1988, the advertisement that is credited with propelling him from single digits to victory in the final weeks of the Iowa campaign was called "Hyundai." The spot charged that Asian countries were engaging in unfair trade practices and threatened economic retaliation against "the Koreans" if they didn't mend their ways. It was hardly the kind of foreigner-bashing you might hear from Pat Buchanan, but it nonetheless left Gephardt open to charges of xenophobia. Sixteen years later, trade is again at the heart of Gephardt's pitch to Iowans, but this time, instead of playing American workers off against foreign workers, he declares them all to be in the same boat. "I'm not going to sell out the American worker, and frankly I'm not going to sell out the worker in these other countries, either," he asserts.

Indeed, the entire first half of his speech builds to a crescendo of outrage over the ghastly living conditions of

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workers in the developing countries of Asia. "They live on the ground," he tells a group of Iowans gathered at a community center in the hamlet of Washington, pausing to scan their faces. "They live in the cardboard boxes that bring the products back to the United States." At each campaign stop, that line seems to trigger some kind of change in Gephardt. He begins to yell: "Raw sewage. You don't just have to go see it, you have to smell it. Raw, human sewage coming down the middle of the street and in the drainage ditch behind the boxes." At this point, the crowd usually falls silent as Gephardt's face reddens and his fists chop the air to punctuate a set of short sentences: "No water. No sewer. No electricity. No *nothing*!" He continues, making a face that suggests he can right now smell the foul odor of that sewage, "They live in worse conditions than most farm animals do in Iowa. It's nothing short of human exploitation for the profit of some corporations. ... We're going to stop human exploitation everywhere in the world." The fury of Gephardt's crescendo is a welcome change for a candidate long derided for being wooden and passionless. It also might be the scariest thing a reporter sees on the campaign trail.

OR RATHER, IT might be if not for the Dean supporters. Politicians attract lots of oddballs, and, not surprisingly, Dean seems to attract the oddest. As the governor finishes up a December 2 speech in Marshalltown, Iowa, an old man with greased hair and a reindeer bolo tie approaches and locks eyes with him. He slips an index card into Dean's hand and says, "Read it when you get time." The man, Lester Schmidt, says that on one side of the card are "twenty reasons President Bush shouldn't have started a war with Iraq." And on the other? "I told him I liked his eyes," says Schmidt. "Clinton and Kennedy, they both had turtle eyes. ... You've seen turtles, haven't you? There's no feeling in them. They bug out. You can tell a lot. You've got nice eyes." Next, a tall man with two long, black braids and a cowboy hat tells Dean that, when Dean gets to the White House, he is going to call him to offer his assistance. "Just remember to tell people when you call in that I met you in Marshalltown," the candidate tells him. (That will surely get President Dean on the phone right away.)

Watching this fall's Democratic debates, in which Dean has been hammered from the left by Gephardt and Kerry for the spending decisions he made as governor of Vermont, it has been hard not to think that Dean's rivals were helping him repackage himself as a moderate. But, on the ground in Iowa, it's another story, with Dean moving even further left than when his campaign began. This week, he launched a new crusade against "large corporate special interests." At an event at Grinnell College, he makes even Gephardt's florid rhetoric seem timid, declaring, "We've allowed our lives to become the slaves to the bottom line of multinational corporations all over the world." Throwing in a dash of Shirley Maclaine for the crowd in Marshalltown, he announces, "We are not cogs in a corporate machine. We are human, spiritual beings who deserve better consideration as human beings than we're getting from this administration." Dean has even started comparing himself to Teddy Roosevelt, the president who cleaned up the corporate excesses of the early twentieth century. All the candidates criticize special interests, and, of course, Gore hit populist notes in 2000, but Dean has begun railing against corporate America in a way no major Democrat has done for decades.

Dean has also now taken explicit sides in the age-old intraparty debate over whether Democrats should concentrate on firing up the base or reaching out to swing voters. On the stump, Dean is now openly dismissive of the whole notion of swing voters. "Somebody who is pretty smart figured this out before we did," he says at Grinnell. "His name is Karl Rove. The reason the president is behaving in such a right-wing way is because he knows the way to win elections is to give your base a reason to be proud to go out and vote, so they don't have to vote for the lesser of two evils anymore. Well, we're going to do that with the Democratic base." He adds, "I say, get our base cranked up, give young people a reason to vote, give our traditional base a reason to vote, and get them excited about the election. And *then* you can work on the very small percentage of people who are not already signed up with Karl Rove or floating around the middle." It's a strange reading of Rove, who went to great pains to secure swing voters in 2000—remember "compassionate conservatism"?—and is laying the groundwork to do so again in 2004. Regardless, just when it seemed Dean was steering back toward the political center, he has made a sharp swerve left, at least in Iowa.

It's also evident that the press corps here is starting to turn on Dean—though not for his latest ideological shift. Rather, they're after Dean because, as the front-runner, he's the race's biggest target. This week, reporters are worked up about his decision to seal records from his eleven-year gubernatorial tenure. Dean has already weathered the Confederate-flag flap and questions about dodging the draft. Will the sealed records be the mistake that finally does him some harm? Reporters dog him across the state, trying to get answers about the mushrooming mini-scandal. But, all of a sudden, the candidate who once invited reporters to ride along with him for interviews is no longer so accessible; he goes a whole day without a media availability. Finally, at Grinnell, things come to a head. Reporters converge on him as he is exiting the event and press him about the records. "You should ask headquarters" in Burlington, Vermont, Dean replies as he disappears for an interview with Norwegian television, a station unlikely to ask about the sealed records. The media pack, thwarted yet again, goes into a mini-meltdown. "What are we doing here?" a reporter complains to one of Dean's press aides as we all walk out into the Iowa cold. "And what are *you* doing here?" The press aide just shrugs. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

At Sea

PETER WEIR AND HIS PRODUCERS must have deep faith in Jung. Here they come with a naval epic set in 1805, offered to a modern world that is not only heavy with its own conflicts but is also haunted by a unique foreboding of universal change. Still, Weir and co. seem to believe that we can be turned to this old-time seafaring epic through Jung's collective unconscious. Deep within us, this film assumes, we have all been touched by the remote experiences of mankind. Beneath the tumult of today's names and places, Weir must think, lies our ancient connection with the sea, with our buried memory of struggle with it and on it.

MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD
(20th Century Fox, Miramax, Universal)

Little else would explain the production today of **MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD.** Certainly old-time fighting ships have been part of film-making for a century. My first star-adoration was of Milton Sills as a sixteenth-century ship captain in *The Sea Hawk* (1924); and since then there have been Neptune's plenty of sailing ships and rugged sailors, among them *Captain Blood*, *Captain Horatio Hornblower*, and three different versions of the Bounty story. But the world has changed even since the most recent of these, and the pressure of the present intervenes now more jaggedly. While I was watching Weir's film, I thought at first: Why? How can we care? Conceding that virtually all war films have at least a touch of romance somewhere in them, how can we be concerned with such a blatantly romantic view of war? But then my own allotment of the collective unconscious began to stir, and at last it answered in some degree to Weir's appeal.

The screenplay by Weir and John Collee was derived from two of Patrick O'Brian's celebrated novels about the British navy in the early 1800s. I have never read an O'Brian book, feeling that this particular niche in my literary experience had been well filled by C. S. Forester. In a recent article in *The New York Times*, Jason Epstein, expert in O'Brian, defended the author against the film. He cited the departures from history and nautical practice that Weir and Collee have imposed on the novels. Epstein knows that this subject of film adaptation is a hardy perennial, but he cares so much about O'Brian that he must speak. The only response—explanation, if you like—is also a hardy perennial: the film world's need for a blend of vulgar practicality and self-sustaining aesthetics. The picture would not have been financed if it had been completely faithful to O'Brian. His story is set in 1812 and deals with British-American conflict. Such a plot was considered a commercial risk, so the film was set in 1805, when Britain's enemy was Napoleon. Other alterations and omissions have to be judged, as is so often the case, in terms of their cinematic success or failure. With great novels, such a criterion is dicey. With good novels, if the films are to work, can't we grant more leeway? Epstein gives the film's first sea battle as an instance of historical-tactical improbability. But this ghostly, mysterious, and bloody battle sets the filmic temper of the British ship's search through the Pacific for a ship that is almost a wraith.

The film exists in itself, and that self raises enough troubling questions without the O'Brian criterion. Though there is plenty of action, particularly at the start and at the end with two blasting sea battles, much of the film is not sufficiently interesting. The British frigate *Surprise* has been ordered to the South Pacific to intercept, destroy, or capture a French vessel, the *Acheron*, which is bigger and more heavily armed. Between the opening and closing encounters of these ships, a long picture intervenes. The filler episodes (let us call them) are almost predictable: the storms, the listless days when the *Surprise* is becalmed, the sailor who must be flogged because of naval punctilio, the chaffing at the officers' dinner table. The only variants in this interim material are slim: the captain plays the violin with the ship's surgeon, his close friend, who is a cellist. That surgeon is also an amateur naturalist who, with a young midshipman, collects insects at islands along the way. When the *Surprise* stops at a port where smiling native women come alongside in boats, I tensed; but, like Melville's *Pequod*, the *Surprise* remains chaste.

From time to time the film almost bows to modernity by looking at life as lived on a sailing ship—the wretched living conditions for most of the men on this small craft. But we see almost nothing of the crew's quarters, and from the crew we get lines like this about the captain: "We'd follow him to the gates of hell." Without expecting the crew of Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, we can wince anyway at chestnuts.

Still, Weir, who has directed such varied films as *Gallipoli* and *Witness* and *Dead Poets Society* and *The Truman Show*, has treated the crew's work very effectively, particularly up in the rigging. The forest of ropes, the expanse of the sails themselves, the skill and the danger and the sheer labor—all are rendered almost choreographically by Russell Boyd, the cinematographer of *Gallipoli*. The editing by Lee Smith, who did *The Truman Show*, not only makes the rigging scenes exciting but also gives the whole film a paradoxical sense of kaleidoscopic yet clear structure. In a war film, the editing of the actual fighting is always a key test, and Smith's speedy mosaics are excellent.

The ship's captain is played by Russell Crowe, to a limited effect that is not his fault. As written, the captain has a narrow range: Crowe is forced to repeat and repeat—tone and flavor. (At one point

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ISLAM AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WEST

Is there something inherent in Wahhabism or Islam generally that creates conflict with the West, or have U.S. diplomatic failures stirred Islamic anger?

The New Republic organized a panel of experts on November 13, 2003, to discuss and debate Islam, political extremism, and the current tensions between the West and the Islamic world. Panelists debated and discussed the roots of Wahhabism, the credibility of the West around the world, the teachings of the Koran and the rise of political Islam. Panel members agreed on the failure of U.S. diplomacy, and the absolute necessity of change in future efforts, but clashed on whether Saudi Arabia's efforts to combat terrorism are effective, or indeed taking place. Following is an edited transcript.

PANELISTS:

NATANA J. DE LONG-BAS
AUTHOR, *WAHHABI ISLAM: FROM REVIVAL AND REFORM TO GLOBAL JIHAD*

JONATHAN SCHANZER
SOREF FELLOW, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

SAMER SHEHATA
PROFESSOR, CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ARAB STUDIES, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

JAY TOLSON
SENIOR WRITER, *U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT*

MODERATOR:

LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN
SENIOR EDITOR, *THE NEW REPUBLIC*

LAWRENCE KAPLAN: Is the press's depiction of the Wahhabi brand of Islam that we hear so much about and that is supported by Saudi Arabia, across the Islamic world, and in the United States — is it accurate? And are we talking about a brand of Islam that is as troublesome as that which we read about in the papers?

NATANA J. DE LONG-BAS: I've written a book about the original founder of the Wahhabi movement, an 18th century man named Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab. I have analyzed his writings on theology, Islamic Law, women and gender, and the topic of jihad, and what I have found is that ibn Abdul Wahab's vision of jihad is very different from what we hear about with Osama bin Laden. In ibn Abdul Wahab's writings, jihad was limited to being a defensive activity that could only be undertaken when a Muslim community was under military attack by another group of people; it was an act of self-defense rather than an act of aggression. The desired outcome of jihad is to establish a treaty relationship between the two warring parties, so that they can have a more cooperative and peaceful relationship in the future.

JONATHAN SCHANZER: I would agree with Natana. Wahhabism, the way it was conceived, was not supposed to be an aggressive ideology. However, I would also say that how it has evolved has become quite dangerous. It appears to be quite antithetical to the values of the United States.

If you look at the way Wahhabism has evolved today in Saudi Arabia, you're looking at a country that has absolutely no political freedom, absolutely no religious freedom. And despite what Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab wanted or had thought about as an idea for women's rights, today in Saudi Arabia [they] are severely curtailed.

The ideology of Wahhabism was not necessarily radical. How it has evolved and how people have interpreted it, and how they have exported it is what has become dangerous.

SAMER SHEHATA: The idea of moving from Wahhabism as an idea system, as a religion, to an explanation of what's going on in Saudi Arabia right now is incredibly problematic. There's no way that one can understand what's going on in Saudi Arabia without understanding all kinds of other issues: political, economy, international relations, et cetera.

The Saudi state is not simply the reflection of the culmination of Wahhabism. When we talk about any religion, any idea system, whether it's Christianity or Judaism, we have to understand a couple of things. The first thing is people interpret ideas and texts and religions, and there are always multiple interpretations of texts and religions. That's very, very important.

And we have to remember that there is no justification, no rationalization, for the actions of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

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And we have to remember that this is the same religion — the same idea set — that American foreign policy embraced in the 1950s and '60s and '70s. We didn't think of it as a threat then at all; in fact, we thought of it as being a core to our policy concerns in the region. Why? Because we believed that kind of Islam was an impediment to the encroachment of communism.

JAY TOLSON: There is a problem of what's called shorthand talk when we use the word Wahhabi. Wahhabi or Wahhabism certainly came to people's consciousness shortly after 9/11. Almost every commentator and writer on the subject — myself included — had to quickly delve into Wahhabist ideas, and I agree with Samer that you cannot simply talk about ideas in abstraction.

There has been a political radicalization of Wahhabism, which to some extent we helped sponsor. But also, it came through a cross-fertilization of ideas, coming mainly from the Muslim brotherhood who were shaping an explicitly political version of Islam in response to their perceived failure of Western ideas in their own political systems.

These notions got a boost after [the war of] '67. Arab nationalism foundered. Islamism emerged as the alternative. It wasn't that distant from Arab nationalism in many respects; it just put a greater emphasis on religion as a unifying force, the Ummah — the Muslim people — being a force to be reunified that transcends the nation-state, which, again, is a Western creation. So you get a medley of ideas, and then you get something else: the increasing Arabization, or you might call it Bedouinization, of Islam.

MODERATOR: If I could just pick up on that point, particularly the Arabization of Islam because in the American public's imagination, often Arabs and Muslims are thought of as synonymous. I wonder if we could try and disentangle this question of Arabs and Islam, and particularly to the extent that there is a reactionary strain in the Middle East that has certainly posed the clear and present danger to the United States.

SCHANZER: After the 1967 war, the loss to Israel, there was a popular sentiment in the Arab world that [Arab nationalism] was an ideology that no longer really worked. And within six or seven years, particularly after the 1973 October War with Israel, a vacuum was filled by Saudi Arabia. There was a sense that there was a political Islam that could fill the vacuum of pan-Arabism, and out of that evolved this radical strain.

The result is that today, out of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, there is a radical strain that a good guesstimate [of] would be 15 percent of the Muslim world adheres to this in some way. There are probably only a few hundred or perhaps even a few thousand, at most, who would adhere to an Osama bin Ladenism, if you will; a very, very small core. Beyond that, you have different concentric circles.

SHEHATA: I have a problem with the idea of the Arabization of Islam as being a problem for a couple of reasons. Clearly there are

Samer Shehata

"OUR REAL ENEMY IS OSAMA BIN LADEN, AL QAEDA, AND RADICAL, VIOLENT GROUPS. POLITICAL ISLAM IS NOT OUR ENEMY."

about 280 million Arabs in the world and not all of them practice Islam the same way.

I agree with my colleagues about the rise of political Islam as an opposition movement. They're right on the money. The standard explanation is that socialism and capitalism failed as ideologies to produce political freedoms and economic growth in the Arab world. They were tried: Arab nationalism, Gamel Abdel Nasser, and so on. The 1960s and '70s saw increasing unemployment, increasing inequality between the rich and poor, [and] corruption in Arab states.

And this is how we have to understand this: Idea systems are used as mobilizing discourses by opposition elements to make sense of the world and to provide a kind of idea of what a better world would look like against these authoritarian states that have produced nothing but failure.

We have to differentiate between political Islam, which is not the enemy, and what our real enemy is. And our real enemy is Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and radical, violent groups. Political Islam is not our enemy.

MODERATOR: Do we really think that the problem here can be boiled down to poverty and lack of education? Does political Islam — do ideas really not matter?

TOLSON: Maybe we should say the Bedouinization of Islam is the problem; when you talk to progressive Muslims and particularly women, they know very clearly what the problem is here: it's a code which basically tries to roll back the calendar in terms of human rights.

We have municipal elections coming up in Saudi Arabia. It has still not been clarified whether this will include women. So these are very key issues that U.S. diplomacy and public diplomacy must repeatedly raise, and these are questions of ideas.

MODERATOR: We have been reading a lot that recent events have really shocked the Saudis, and there's talk of de-funding madrassas [a madrassa is an Islamic religious school] and much more carefully monitoring funds being used abroad for various religious and political movements.

Is any of this going to make a difference? First, if it's genuine, can the Saudis put this genie back in the bottle? And second is, if they even try, will it make a difference?

SCHANZER: There has been a sense in Wahhabist outreach that certain aspects of the West were things that needed to be defended against, and therefore it was important to teach a more puritanical or orthodox version of Islam.

What has happened is the efforts have gotten away from Saudi Arabia and other countries that have tried to export this. Right now what the world is witnessing is a confrontation between what we would call militant Islam and moderate Islam. This is the crux of the matter. This is an issue that must be debated within the Muslim world. This is not something that we can dictate from the United States. No one can tell Muslims how to interpret their religion, what is appropriate, what is not appropriate, and if the efforts of Saudi Arabia are going to be effective, they're going to need to begin to discuss this at greater length.

The goal must be for the Saudis, with the help of the U.S. and with the help of other allies, to find the Muslim moderates. Give them a podium. Give them a way to get their message out so that message resonates more than that of Osama bin Laden or other radicals.

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DE LONG-BAS: There is recognition in Saudi Arabia that it's not enough to have senior clerics and government officials saying we condemn terrorism and these terrible things that have happened are atrocities and they're against Islam. There's also recognition that a study needs to take place within the religious establishments to take a closer look at their interpretation of Islam. We have heard some senior clerics talking more about tolerance, and there's a movement now to return directly to the texts of the Koran and the Hadis to make sure that the interpretation that is being taught is more faithful to the scriptures.

SCHANZER: You've heard a lot about the Saudi funding of charities, and those funds have gone on to other terrorist entities or to help fund terrorist attacks. We also know that there have been some fundraisers for Hamas and other radical groups inside the Palestinian territories.

You need to see increased control over where the money goes from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I understand that a lot of the financing of terror organizations and charity organizations that fund terror organizations, most of that money, emanates from the Gulf, and within that, most comes from Saudi Arabia. So this is one of the things that we're going to have to see the Saudis begin to do more of if there is going to be an effective effort in the war on terror.

SHEHATA: I'm a critic of the Saudi regime, as [of] all regimes, including the Bush Administration. But I do think that [the Saudis] have — in the last year and a half or two years or sometime after 9/11 when they realized that they've had some serious problems — changed their tune on a number of fronts. There really has been a great deal of cooperation in terms of the war on terrorism, whether it be intelligence or funding of charitable organizations.

The Saudi regime realizes that their necks are on the line here. As we saw on May 12th and as we saw a couple of days ago, al Qaeda and violent Islamist organizations want to do harm to them as well as to us, and the reforms that are taking place are not necessarily because of their great love for democracy, but because they want to save their skins.

MODERATOR: You mentioned President Bush's speech or at least his campaign for democratizing the Arab world. And I wonder what the panelists think about this newly launched effort and particularly its reception in the Arab world, because I noticed not surprisingly that after Bush gave the speech in NED [National Endowment for Democracy], the press carried the reactions of many elites in the Arab world, and unsurprising, the reaction was fairly cynical, and people thought it was really just purely self-interested and to cloak an alternative agenda.

DE LONG-BAS: The answer to the question depends in part on how the promotion of democracy is handled: if it's viewed in the countries as being something that's coming in from the outside and is being imposed upon them. And there are people who perceive it this way, [so] this becomes a new form of Western colonialism in the Muslim world. And if it's done in that way, there will definitely be opposition to it.

Jonathan Schanzer
"NO ONE CAN TELL MUSLIMS HOW TO INTERPRET THEIR RELIGION."

Where the more grassroots level campaigns have been more effective is when they're able to address these issues and present them from within their own tradition. There is a tradition in Islam of Shura, which is consultation. That's what Majilis Al-Shura in Saudi Arabia is named for. If it can be reinterpreted in the context of Shura, there will be more positive reception for it.

SHEHATA: We cannot ask for sweeping changes tomorrow, or we're going to get political instability and things that you don't like in the short term. At the same time, we can't let up, we can't lose sight of the goal, and we have to have positive inducements.

We have a serious credibility problem in the Arab world about our commitment now to promoting democracy. There are elites who also know our past policy and they say, you want to promote democracy? Well, what's going on in Iraq? Is there a timeline that the U.S. is going to get out and let Iraqis actually have elections? And what happens if Iraqis don't want U.S. Army bases in Iraq, or they want Islam in the constitution? Isn't that what democracy is about? Democracy produces unknown outcomes, and we have to be willing to live with that as long as people adhere to the basic principles, which are rule of law, equal rights, freedom of the press, independent judiciary, et cetera.

SCHANZER: It's important to note that a lot of the anti-Americanism that has developed over the last couple of decades has really been about the U.S. allowing autocrats to remain in power. By and large a lot of people in the Arab world are very upset. They see the United States, particularly since the decline of the Cold War, as sort of being the superpower that pulls the strings, the one entity that can make sweeping changes if it chooses to do so.

Our relationships with countries in the Arab world are certainly going to have to change. We can call it democratization; we can call it liberalization. What it means is having just a little bit more of a performance-based relationship. If there's going to be aid, there are going to have to be conditions for that aid.

SHEHATA: When we talk about anti-Americanism in the Arab and the Muslim world, let's look at the polling data. It's not anti-Americanism, anti-American culture, and so on. No. It's anti-U.S. foreign policy. People want to come here. They want to go to Disney World. They want to send their kids to school here. They want to consume American products.

This issue about supporting authoritarian regimes — it is not the first and it's not even the second issue that drives anti-American sentiment in the Arab world. It is our policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. All of the polls demonstrate it consistently. Palestine is in the blood of the Arab world. It is not another country; it is part of their identity. And we are perceived in the Arab and Muslim world not as an external player. We are perceived as being part of internal politics, whether it's supporting authoritarian regimes or whether it's allowing the Israelis to brutalize a people and oppress them and not give them self-determination.

This is the primary issue in the Arab world driving anti-Americanism, and it is also,

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believe it or not, the most important issue in Arab domestic politics.

MODERATOR: Since we touched on the question of Israel and Palestine, the question is why they feel so strongly, and I wonder if their grievances are being appropriately channeled or is Israel such an issue because governments make it an issue?

TOLSON: Obviously there are two very strong sides to this argument, and we came as close, the U.S., to backing a reasonable — more than a reasonable — a bold first step, and it was rejected by the existing Palestinian Authority. It seems to me that every time this subject is brought up, that little historical fact, which isn't even that historical, is obliterated from memory and it certainly is never brought up in the Arab press.

When there was a deal on the table, the Saudis, who have subsequently called for a similar kind of deal, were conspicuously silent. The ongoing dis-ease, the ongoing conflict, is in the direct interest of the most authoritarian regimes in this part of the world, and to deny that reality means that you can't even begin to have a discussion.

QUESTION: Relative to the upcoming elections, how big a role — not terrorism, but this kind of diplomatic-informed policy discussion — how do you think it will factor in the race for next year?

SHEHATA: It has to factor quite seriously. If we're talking about Middle East policy, foreign policy, the war on terrorism, U.S. national security, this is the leading, if not the second, issue along with the economy.

Where's Osama? Where's Saddam? Where are the weapons of mass destruction? How's our standing in the Arab world now, after all of that money spent on public diplomacy? How do our allies think of us in Europe? What happened to civil liberties and the things that we're supposed to be fighting for, that we're supposed to be promoting?

Why are 130,000 U.S soldiers in Iraq getting killed one or two a day? I was there in August. It is unbelievable. There's no state in Iraq — there's no authority. I have never been in my life to a place without a state, without government. You want to buy documents? You want to buy anything? You can do it in Iraq. Have we made the Middle East safer as a result of war? This has to be the leading issue in the next elections.

TOLSON: It will no doubt be the determining issue. And it will all depend on what the administration does, whether it finally comes to any kind of decision on critical issues. What has been most appalling about this effort, whether you supported it originally or were opposed to it, is that on really critical decisions, there has never been a clear consensus of action.

We can't come to a decision on such things as whether or not to rearm the Iraqi army. This should have been decided a long time ago, whether we went with the INC plan or the modified State Department plan

Jay Tolson

"BEDOUINIZATION OF ISLAM IS A CODE WHICH TRIES TO ROLL BACK THE CALENDAR OF HUMAN RIGHTS."

or the CIA plan or whichever. We should have had a plan.

If there is no decision made about these key issues, the situation in Iraq will descend into greater chaos. And I have to say the buck stops at the president's desk. He really has not been able to come to a clear decision about his lieutenants.

MODERATOR: The buck does stop at his desk, but for a variety of historical reasons, particularly having to do with the way the public perceives the two parties and national security, I think Bush on this has perhaps more political latitude than he should in terms of the upcoming elections. Polls have held steady regardless of what's happened in Iraq. And the reason is there's ample room to criticize the administration for its conduct of foreign policy.

SHEHATA: It's just habitual mistakes. I mean, come on: Osama, Saddam, Iraq was a lie, Halliburton, corruption? What's going on?

We know what the plan is to get out [of Iraq]. It's internationalize, more troops, troops from the Muslim world and NATO, different kinds of troops, timeline, roadmaps so Iraqis know when they're going to get their country back. That's what the solution is.

MODERATOR: I agree with you. The problem is who's making the arguments and the baggage they carry with the American people, still today. Isn't there some value in having a secular constitution or a constitution that even in a fairly religious society emphasizes some division of church and state?

SCHANZER: If what you're trying to achieve is a democracy, you're going to have to de-emphasize the role of religion and try to emphasize individual human rights.

DE LONG-BAS: Secularism in some parts of the world is viewed as suspicious because it's very much associated with Western colonization. They can work through the baggage of that history and find a way of implementing a secular regime, if that is the population's desire, and in a way that they feel is not threatening to their own culture and identity. And nations have to determine for themselves what that authentic identity is. If Islam is a critical part of that, then that is that nation's right.

MODERATOR: I think this panel makes clear that for all the talk of how the West and Islam are not inherently incompatible, it's fairly clear to me, at least judging on today's panel, that Islam and the West actually are divided by some fairly pronounced and markedly different views on Israel, democracy, politics, and society, of religion's place in society, and also views of the United States, and I do not think this is an altogether healthy situation to say the least.

Thank you, everyone, for coming today.

To view the complete transcript or a webcast from the event please go to http://www.tnr.com/panel/panel_islam.mhtml

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continued from page 26

he rallies his crew by shouting, "Do you want to see a guillotine in Piccadilly?" Apart from the fact that we cannot perceive how the *Surprise* could prevent this, the line smacks of its writers, not of its speaker.) The captain has no texture of self. Crowe is a serious actor, but here he is like a good pianist given a long piece and a narrow keyboard. Paul Bettany who plays the ship's surgeon, was apparently intended to fix us charismatically. This does not happen. Max Pirkis, the young naturalist midshipman, is pleasant. The other actors are adequate.

The costumes almost feel authentic, as if we could touch the cloth, though I still wonder about those top hats and tricornes that officers wore. How did they stay on in that weather? The sound track relies considerably on a figure of speech made real—the ocean's roar. As for the score by Iva Davies, the best of it is what Davies didn't write. Twice in the course of the film, once during a battle, the low strings give us Vaughan Williams's "Fantasia on a Theme of Tallis." Not exactly what Tallis or Vaughan Williams intended, perhaps, but none the less enriching.

One test of a spectacular film, for me, is whether I keep thinking throughout the picture of its expense. If this thought never occurs, then obviously the expense is justified. With *Master and Commander*, despite the faint Jungian simmering, despite a fair number of vivid sequences, I thought recurrently of the $150 million that the picture is said to have cost. Exorbitant. ■

ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

Shakespeare in Bloom

HAROLD BLOOM IS ENJOYING a vogue these days and so is his favorite author. In the last few weeks, at least five new Shakespeare productions have opened that are in some way indebted to this inveterate Bardolator. Like Samuel Johnson, his rotund critical forbear, Harold Bloom believes that Shakespeare is a "mortal god" to whom we owe everything, including our notions of what constitutes the human. If in previous ages theater labored under the shadow of William Shakespeare, Shakespeare has lately been laboring (in America at least) under the shadow of Harold Bloom.

THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN
(Public Theater)

HENRY IV
(Vivian Beaumont Theater)

AS YOU LIKE IT
(Wilbur Theatre)

Congenial as it is to Shakespearean scholarship, Bloom's large shadow sometimes threatens to eclipse Shakespearean production. Although he acknowledges that the plays were written to be performed, Bloom (like many scholar-critics) seems to prefer Shakespeare on the page to Shakespeare on the stage. It is true that he will occasionally honor the odd Shakespeare performance, providing it is traditional enough. He is full of praise for the way John Gielgud warbled the Bard's native woodnotes, especially in *Hamlet*, and he is not reluctant to admit that Ralph Richardson's celebrated Falstaff changed his life. But those performances are more than half a century old. The more recent watershed *Midsummer Night's Dream*'s—notably Peter Brooks's trapeze version with the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Alvin Epstein's amalgam of the text with Purcell's *Fairy Queen* for the Yale Repertory Theatre—left Bloom colder than Hamlet's ghost. In his compendious study *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, which appeared in 1998, Bloom is hardly the best guide to acting and directing the plays, if indeed these professions hold any interest for him at all.

For Bloom, the stage is full of impurities and the best theater is in his head. "I have never seen a performance," he writes about THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN, "and don't particularly want to, since Shakespeare's contributions to the play are scarcely dramatic." It is true that this is hardly Shakespeare's finest writing. It is also true that no more than two-fifths of the work have been attributed to him. The rest belongs to his contemporary John Fletcher, whose customary collaborator was Francis Beaumont. Fletcher was celebrated for having invented a new middle genre that he identified as "tragicomedy"—"not so called," he wrote, "in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy."

The Two Noble Kinsmen not only brings one of its characters near death, it pushes him over the edge in a plot-resolving accident. But otherwise, like most of Shakespeare's late romances, the play has all the far-fetched qualities of a tragic-comic fairy tale. Based on Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale," *The Two Noble Kinsmen* weaves an intriguing story without much depth of character, using verse that is often bland and lacking in imagery. In the last act, where Shakespeare's hand is most evident (very likely the last words he ever wrote for the stage), the poetry intensifies. But the plot, which is almost certainly provided by Fletcher, is virtually a grab bag of Shakespearean characters and motifs.

At the New York Public Theater, in a staging by Darko Tresnjak, these characters and motifs are presented with a minimum of embroidery. Laid in a court ruled by the same Theseus and Hippolyta who presided over Athens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the play tells the story of two Theban cousins, Arcite and Palamon, who swear eternal friendship, rather like Proteus and Valentine in *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, only to fall out in a similar way over love of the same woman. Captured in war, they treat their imprisonment as a form of penitential purification, in the manner of Lear; but it is not long before they are baiting each other, much like Hal and Hotspur, in preparation for battle over Hippolyta's sister Emilia. There are borrowings from *Cymbeline* and *Timon* as well, not to mention the theft of a whole character from *Hamlet*. The Jailer's Daughter, who goes mad for love of Palamon, could be Ophelia's double. Fletcher even gives her the opportunity to sing sad songs in a watery location (among them Desdemona's "Willow, Willow, Willow") and later has her distribute posies and make lewd jokes. One suspects that Fletcher enlisted Shakespeare in this project not so much to exploit his poetic genius as to ensure against being sued for plagiarism.

Unlike Bloom, I was happy to have

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the opportunity to see this rarely produced play because the story holds one's attention, and because the director and his cast are able to tell it without much more in the way of stage effects than a triangular cage to represent the prison and primary color lights to underline emotional changes. Not all of the acting is memorable, but I was particularly touched by three repertory-trained veterans—Sam Tsoutsouvas as Theseus, Jonathan Fried as the Jailer, and Candy Buckley in a variety of roles—as well as by David Harbour and Graham Hamilton playing Arcite and Palamon, and Doan Ly as Emilia. Let me suggest another reason for seeing this play. It contains sexual ambiguities—Emilia's speech about "the true love 'tween maid and maid" and Arcite's remark to Palamon about how "we are one another's wife"—that could be cited in support of recent rulings on gay marriage.

Falstaff is Bloom's favorite character, the one with whom he identifies most closely and most noisily. He has spilled a lot of ink trying to rescue the reputation of the fat knight from the moral disapproval of what he calls "academic puritans and professorial power freaks." This may have led him to over-estimate Falstaff's virtues—"a comic Socrates," he calls him, "neither immoral nor amoral but of another realm"; and the current production of **Henry IV** at the Vivian Beaumont, as a long article in *The New York Times* tells us, is partly an effort to redress the balance. The director, Jack O'Brien, has set out to show the darker side of a character who, rather than being Bloom's "embodiment of human freedom," has serious flaws.

I agree with both arguments in this age-old debate. It is highly probable, as some commentators have noted, that Shakespeare originally intended Falstaff to be a Vice figure seducing the prodigal son Prince Hal from his true path, with characters such as the Lord Chief Justice functioning to show him the way of righteousness. It is also true that Falstaff escaped from this projected morality play to become the full-blooded vitalist that Bloom and the rest of us admire, while Hal emerged as a bit of a prig sharing some of his brother Lancaster's Machiavellian genes.

But the controversy has virtually nothing to do with what is happening on the stage of the Beaumont. There that good actor Kevin Kline, tricked out with body padding and the traditional full white beard, is giving an intelligent reading of the role, but not one that captures more than its physical definition. There is little that is unexpected in his playing, no element of risk that would expose the dangerous side of the man. This is a character out of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, the roly-poly knight of the Victorian imagination. Discovered asleep against a beam on his first appearance, Kline needs a lot of help to rise to his feet. He clearly has a hell of a hangover. And his voice rumbles with authority. The actor is giving an excellent impersonation in every exterior way, but he is essentially an impostor, hidden behind his whiskers, like the domesticated, middle-class Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

I had the opportunity not long ago to see Bloom interpret the character himself in a staged reading held with my company under the direction of Karin Coonrod. Obviously not an actor, Bloom nevertheless managed to essentialize Falstaff's intelligence, his wit, and particularly his depression and fatigue, using very little in the way of acting technique or interpretation. With his hooded eyes and his melancholy voice, he gave one of the saddest readings of the part I have ever heard. And that is precisely what is missing from Kline's performance: the tragic side of the character. Without that, you can't really find the comic side either. Neither do his companions in Eastcheap, least of all Ancient Pistol whose fustian Marlovian pretension has been reduced to a feeble apostrophe. The tavern scenes have neither punch nor pathos, the sublime induction scene has been sadly emasculated, and there's not a lot of fun even in the exposure of Falstaff's cowardice.

Kline is smart enough to know the character is not entirely secure in the affections of Prince Hal. He has a lovely moment in the rejection scene: when Hal throws him to the ground, he gives the impression of shrinking into insignificance. But his reactions are often too perfunctory. The great line that signifies Falstaff's consciousness of a dismal friendless future ("Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pound") is almost a throwaway.

The rest of this lavish, highly-praised production, in an adaptation by Dakin Matthews that conflates the two parts of *Henry IV* into an evening lasting less than four hours, is full of dazzling stagecraft, particularly in the thunderous battle scenes, punctuated by smoke, fire, and Mark Bennett's explosive sounds. What it lacks is much evidence of a creative imagination. There is no sign whatever, except for Ethan Hawke's punk-rocker performance as Hotspur—butch-cut, bare-chested, pounding his fist against his palm—that this play is being produced in the opening years of the twenty-first century. Ralph Funicello's scaffolded set is geometric and functional enough, but Jess Goldstein's period costumes seem borrowed from fifteenth-century paintings. As for the cast, few of them have been allowed to justify Hamlet's conviction that they are "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time."

The performance with the most pith, and the most purpose, is given by Michael Hayden, a late replacement for Billy Crudup as Prince Hal. He manages the difficult transition from truant prince to true king with admirable strength. I was also impressed by Richard Easton's crabbed aging Bolingbroke, Byron Jennings's saucy Worcester, Jeff Weiss's doddering Justice Shallow, and Anastasia Barzee's velvet-voiced Lady Mortimer. Indeed, there is hardly a weak performance in the evening, with the exception of an over-the-top Mistress Quickly by the usually dependable Dana Ivey. But there is too little of Shakespeare's divine comedy, depth, and imagination, and too much pageantry, stage effect, and spectacle to satisfy my taste or, I would guess, that of Harold Bloom.

I saw another traditionalist production recently at the Wilbur Theatre in Boston, Peter Hall's **As You Like It**. As Rosalind it features Hall's daughter Rebecca, a tall, willowy beauty reminiscent of Emma Thompson. No doubt she will develop substantial acting weight, but those with memories of Katherine Hepburn or Vanessa Redgrave or even Gwyneth Paltrow in the role might find her a little undernourished at present. Playing a character who Bloom believes most fully represents "Shakespeare's own stance towards human nature," Rebecca Hall is winsome, flirtatious, and engaging. Disguised in a slouch fedora hat and man's open shirt, she towers over Rebecca Callard's diminutive Celia like an Elizabethan Mutt and Jeff. Her charm is undeniable, though her affected East End speech sometimes makes her sound like she's eating mashed potatoes (when Orlando observes "Your accent is something finer than you could purchase in

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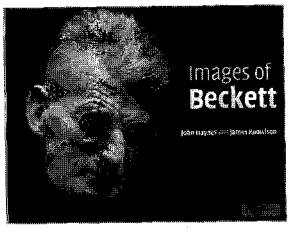

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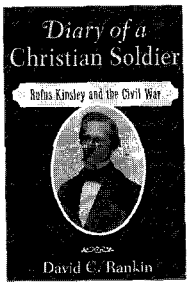

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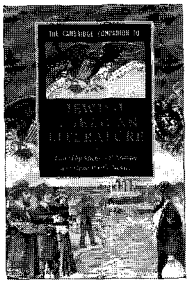

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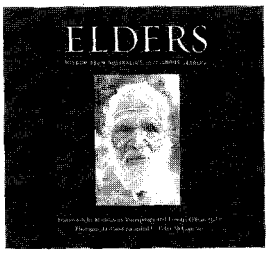

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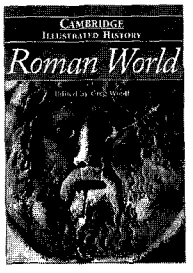

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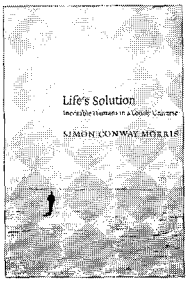

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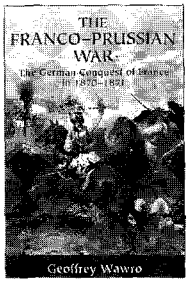

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so removed a dwelling," he can't be listening). She is someone to be carefully watched and fairly admired, not prematurely lionized as she will be.

This *As You Like It* is a sober minimalist affair, clearly the work of a director who wants to achieve his effects with the least effort, as he did so masterfully in *The Homecoming* when the male characters pulled their cigars away from a single lighted match like a flower opening its petals. Hall's *As You Like It* does not possess the same energy or strength. John Gunter's setting for the Forest of Arden consists of exquisitely lighted trees against a bosky scrim. But the atmosphere is too somber and oppressive to convey the bucolic beauty of this enchanted place, that pastoral sweetness I remember so well from the Hepburn production when Ernest Thesiger spoke The Seven Ages of Man over a crackling fire that decades later I can still smell.

All of the performances are professional without being penetrating, confident without being electrifying, with the possible exception of David Yelland, doing an impressive doubling job as the raging usurper Duke Frederick and his gentle banished brother. But the show is tired. I spent a lot of this three-hour evening feeling a little bored, a trifle impatient, my mind wandering over such idle questions as why the great majority of Shakespeare's characters only have one name. I think I can guess why Harold Bloom would say that Sir John Falstaff remains a prime exception. ■

DAVID HAJDU ON MUSIC
Tramps Like Who?

THIRTY YEARS AGO THIS FALL, Bruce Springsteen released his first album, *Greetings from Asbury Park, New Jersey*. I knew from whence he greeted, having grown up in the same state a few years behind him. One of Springsteen's teenage bands, the Castiles, had been the entertainment at my friend Doug's eighth-grade graduation party; so when Columbia Records sent the twenty-four-year-old and his new group, the E Street Band, on a tour of midsized Northeast colleges to promote his record debut, Doug and I decided to see him in concert at Seton Hall University, an event conducted for a couple of hundred people in the cafeteria of the student center. I still recall much of the show—the kaleidoscopic original tunes, the party-song oldies such as "Twenty-Flight Rock," a funked-up Dylan cover ("I Want You")—and one moment most vividly: About midway into "Spirits in the Night," one of the more soulful numbers on that first Springsteen album, he broke a guitar string. (Springsteen was the only guitarist in his band at the time.) He signaled the rhythm section to vamp on the tune's slow shuffle pattern, and he launched into a monologue, swaying in time as he told a sweet, funny tale about getting his first guitar and trying to learn how to play it while his father, who hated the instrument and everything it represented, tried to smoke the boy out of his bedroom through a heat vent in the floor—nonchalantly restringing the guitar as he talked. He finished the story and had the string tuned on beat, right on time for the band to kick in for the final chorus. The audience, small as it was, roared. Springsteen had simultaneously endeared himself to the crowd as a regular guy and thrilled them by proving that he was no such thing.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S AMERICA: THE PEOPLE LISTENING, A POET SINGING
By Robert Coles
(Random House)

This past August, I went to see Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band at another venue in northeast Jersey. This one was Giants Stadium. The show that I attended was the first of ten that he and his group (reunited in 1995 after eleven years apart) were doing in the same arena during their summer tour, a world record for stadium concerts. The stage seemed larger than the building in which they had played at Seton Hall, and Springsteen was using three additional guitarists (Nils Lofgren, Steve van Zandt, and Patti Scialfa, who is also his wife), each of whom was positioned farther from Bruce than I had been on that evening thirty years earlier. Several technicians scurried among them between songs, replacing their guitars with freshly strung and tuned instruments. Some fifty-five thousand people were there, but the atmosphere was oddly intimate. Springsteen, now fifty-four, carried on with his old boyish fire and neighborly charm, bouncing around during the rock-and-roll numbers and chatting up the audience between songs. Before one of his somber recent pieces, "My City of Ruins," he reminisced for a bit about Asbury Park and welcomed the audience to meet him there while they were in New Jersey. At the sound of the first note of each song, the crowd would start cheering. The person to my right, like most of the male half of the audience, was a white fellow of about forty, and he was keeping an account of the show in a spiral notebook, so he could later compare the set list with those of the four other concerts in Springsteen's run at Giants Stadium that he also had tickets to see.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT BRUCE Springsteen that inspires devotion on such a scale three decades after he made his national debut? In 1973, Seton Hall also staged several major concerts in its main auditorium (a leap above the student center), featuring the then-estimable likes of Mott the Hoople, Graham Nash, John Lee Hooker, Jackson Browne, and Linda Ronstadt—every act since disbanded, forgotten, deceased, or largely inconsequential. The question of Springsteen's sustaining power is a good one for social scientists as well as music critics, and at least two of the former have done some work on it. In 1998, Daniel Cavicchi, a professor of American Studies at the Rhode Island School of Design, published his *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans*, a serious-minded study of Bruce fandom; and now Robert Coles, the James Agee Professor of Social Ethics at Harvard, has produced **BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S AMERICA: THE PEOPLE LISTENING, A POET SINGING**, a look at Springsteen's impact on the general public. Both of the books come to the same fairly obvious conclusion, which the evidence of any recent Springsteen concert would bear out: he is acutely attuned to

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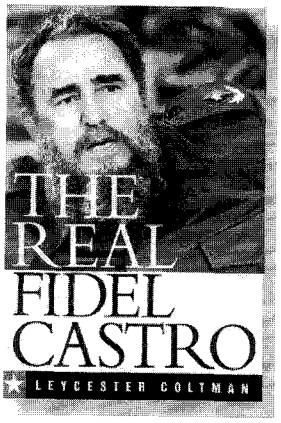

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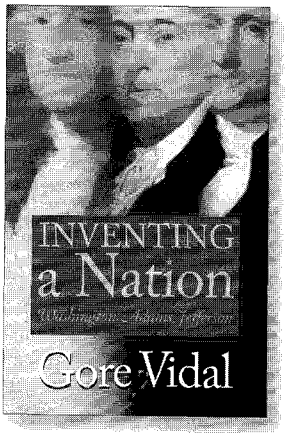

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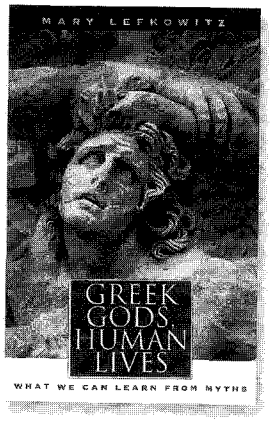

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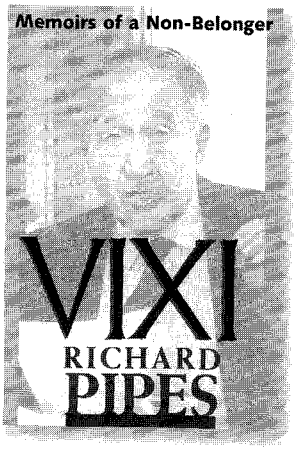

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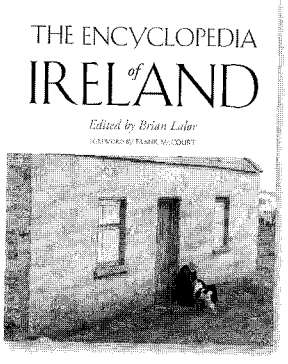

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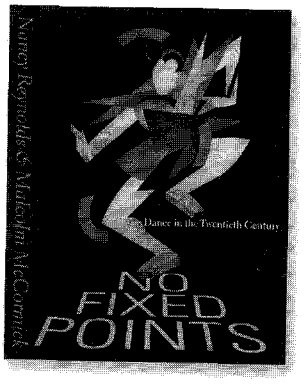

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the attitudes and everyday concerns of working people (working white people, at least) and, in his public image as well as his music, he echoes those views and these interests in accessible, appealing terms. He has built a relationship with a substantial portion of the American population that, like many successful long-term relationships, is mutually reinforcing. Coles quotes his late Harvard colleague Erik H. Erikson as saying of Springsteen, "There's an American who knows Americans so well that their voices become his own!"

Coles, much the same, sees Springsteen as "a poet, performer, music maker who has come to the people as their gratefully embraced spokesperson—their morally introspective teacher, whose writing mind, singing voice, traveling appearances prompt people to stop and think about the lives they are living in contemporary America. His songs give public expression to the yearnings, doubts, memories, worries of American lives, and render them in verse...." *Bruce Springsteen's America* is comprised mostly of first-person accounts by Springsteen's listeners of how his songs reflect and touch upon their lives: a truck driver who sees virtue in the responsibilities of "Growin' Up" (a song from Springsteen's *Asbury Park* album); the wife of a traveling businessman who hears her husband's dual nature expressed in Springsteen's tunes "Glory Days" (one of the hit singles from his heyday in the 1980s) and "Tunnel of Love" (the title song from his ruminative mid-career album about romance); a grandmother compelled to hold her old husband's hand when she hears "If I Should Fall Behind" (a country ballad from *Lucky Town* in 1992).

"He's the Best!" the grandmother gushes about Springsteen in the concluding passage of Coles's book. "Why? Because he's one of us plain, ordinary folks, trying to keep ourselves standing honest and clean, and loving each other, and loving our America, and hoping our country will be the good one it's been for so many, and be a better one, even, by being a good one for as many as are here, with us, our fellow citizens." Many of the people Coles quotes in this book—and in his other books, come to think of it—talk like this, in folksy bromides that gain veracity when imagined in the voice of Jimmy Stewart. Personally, I have never met anyone who thinks or speaks this way, and I grew up among truckers (such as my brother-in-law) and diner waitresses (such as my mother) in suburban Jersey. My own grandmother was an irascible skeptic, her patriotism corroded from hard living. I suppose that Coles has a gift for finding the prototypical sort of everyday people that one does not meet every day.

As intellectual ballast, Coles prefaces his ten chapters of testimony from ordinary folks with a pair of introductory sections dense with the testimony of exceptional types: the poet William Carlos Williams (on the subject of his home state, New Jersey, and its native pre-Springsteen pop idol, Frank Sinatra) and the novelist and essayist Walker Percy (on Springsteen), predominantly, along with contributions from Erikson (on Springsteen, as well) and William Shawn, the former editor of *The New Yorker* (on Joseph Mitchell, the master of journalistic portraiture). Being a social scientist, Coles is skilled at employing oral testimony as evidence of social phenomena; here he presents long quotations from Williams and Percy that tie into Coles's thesis on Springsteen. Williams talks of Sinatra as Coles thinks of Springsteen: "Sinatra's voice rouses up the youngsters these days [1950s], and why not!... People loved hearing him, and they loved looking at this kid who was giving them all he had—working his voice over and over to tunes they knew but couldn't sing on their own.... Sinatra—his voice goes all over, and it's in the lives of those who hear it, and play it to themselves in their minds."

Similarly, Percy, as Coles quotes him, goes on at startling length about the Boss. It is well known that Percy once wrote a letter to Springsteen. The novelist's nephew Will Percy had shown his uncle an article noting Springsteen's Catholicism in *America*, the Jesuit weekly, and the elder Percy sent Springsteen a note expressing his admiration and inquiring about Bruce's "spiritual journey." (Springsteen did not attend to the letter until Percy had died, but then wrote to his widow.) Coles gives us pages of commentary related to Springsteen and his milieu from Percy, among them: "This guy is his own boss—he's earned the title [the Boss] every inch of the way: he sings *of* us while singing *to* us, and what you hear (the one you're hearing) is a plain, ordinary guy soaring way above himself and everyone around him through his voice, and through the songs he's written.... It sure would be great if some of us, who talk to ourselves, hearing a singer talking to himself, then to us, with his own words that he uses to make music—if some of us heard each other doing our talking with our talking buddy, I call him." Therein is the ("great") idea for *Bruce Springsteen's America*.

The fact that William Carlos Williams and Walker Percy had such extensive conversations with Robert Coles on the subjects of the New Jersey pop singers Frank Sinatra and Bruce Springsteen, and that those discussions yielded insights so parallel and neatly suited to Coles's own take on Springsteen is incredible—utterly incredible. I was not there to overhear them, of course, and it is impossible to check with Williams and Percy, or with the late Erikson and Shawn, whom Coles's other deceased sources quotes in his book's opening sections. But I did ask Will Percy about the comments on Springsteen that Coles attributes to his uncle, and he called them "outrageous." Walker Percy "definitely didn't talk like that," according to his nephew.

It seems pertinent to note that Coles and Springsteen are friends, and that the Boss did "the Doc" (his nickname for Coles) a sizable favor early this year, although Coles mentions neither fact in his book. In February, Springsteen gave

Watchmaker's Insomnia

I, too, was once luminous and lonely
as a star. The air is thick above Egg Harbor,
where, in 1884, a cargo of Dutch clocks
sank into eternity with its crew.

My ancestors work the nightshift
in a far-off mining town. A steam whistle
is calling them to rise. The second hand
recalls our calculations and infidelities,

the ways we fall—asleep,
in love—and what little I wouldn't permit
in a dream: my fingers running along

the wrong dress, and all the petty thefts
I've plotted. I was removing a bent coil spring
when the watch began ticking on its own.

BENJAMIN PALOFF

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a solo concert in Somerville, Massachusetts to benefit *DoubleTake* magazine, which Coles founded and ran. ("It is completely accurate to say that Bruce Springsteen saved this magazine," the publisher, Hugo Barreca, announced prematurely; the journal subsequently suspended publication.) From the stage that night, Springsteen praised Coles's book *The Secular Mind* for its treatment of the "moment during everybody's day when things stop" and "you're connected to other things, larger things ... the birth of a child, death of somebody that you love ... listening to 'Louie Louie.' I guess that that idea is sort of what songs and music and art are for."

THE SONGS OF BRUCE SPRINGsteen have long teetered on the axis of the transcendent and the mundane. I refer mainly to the lyrics; Springsteen's music, with notable exceptions (in his early work especially), has tended to serve as a textured backdrop to the words. He has spoken in his concert monologues of having dreamed, in his boyhood, of becoming a writer—"a author," he has said, diffusing any taint of uppitiness in the notion with good-ol'-boy bad grammar—and his songs have been writerly since *Greetings from Asbury Park, New Jersey* (and before that, as bootleg recordings of his youthful demo tapes demonstrate). At first he pursued a kind of scattershot street poeticism (hence the inevitable comparisons to Dylan) but soon he calmed down; somewhere between his third record (*Born to Run*) and its subdued follow-up (*Darkness at the Edge of Town*), Springsteen developed an interest in narrative concision. He started writing rock and roll like a author of short fiction, drawing characters through nicely observed detail ("The screen door slams, Mary's dress waves...") and spinning drama, instead of whipping up melodrama ("I got a job working construction for the Johnstown Company / But lately there ain't been no work on account of the economy").

"I figured out what I wanted to write about, the people that mattered to me, and who I wanted to be," he wrote in the liner notes to his *Greatest Hits*. "I saw friends and family struggling to lead decent, productive lives and I felt an everyday kind of heroism in this." Yet Springsteen's treatment of this subject matter was never as simplistic as the three or four chords that he played under his lyrics. He did not become a polemical social realist like Woody Guthrie or John Steinbeck, any more than he had been a fabulist like Dylan. He ended up a creature of the realm in between, like Flannery O'Connor (a southern Catholic, as Walker Percy was). For the past couple of decades, his central interests have been the forces of mystery that drive ordinary people to inexplicable actions such as killing, betrayal, and watching television all night.

It is telling that Springsteen sought inspiration for his music in the struggles of his "friends and family"—from the people around him, rather than himself—and that he connected their experience not to the person he was at the time of his writing, nor to who he had been earlier in life, but to who he "wanted to be." A mercurial sense of self is the birthright of New Jerseyians. In the postwar years when Springsteen was growing up in Freehold, a gray square on the grid of suburbs that fills much of the state map, there was little to instill a sense of native identity—no network television stations, no professional sport teams, no

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university named for the state. To those growing up there then, Jersey often seemed like empty space between Philadelphia and New York, which were the places in the morning papers, where the evening news happened and our parents drove for a night out on their wedding anniversary. You can feel the poles of both cities pulling on Springsteen's early music—the warm, Philly-soul romanticism of "Spirits in the Night," "For You," and "4th of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)"; the swanked-up Manhattan cool of "It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City," "New York City Serenade," and "Jungleland."

Seeking his own musical identity, Springsteen came to discover the hometown of his youth and the quiet, hard lives that adults were leading while he was dreaming of rock stardom. By the time he started writing about that world, however, he had left it, having succeeded at becoming rich and famous; so he was still not writing about himself. Much of Springsteen's work, as evocative as it is at its best, has an under layer of detachment, a feeling of posing and, on occasion, of pandering. You can hear it in the mannered stoicism of "The Working Life," the stylized Dust Bowl grit of *Nebraska*, and, most discomfortingly, in the artful but incongruous songs about Mexican migrant workers and drug traffickers on *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. (There is a rich Latino tradition of folk music about colorful bad men, called *narcocorrido*, but it is not Springsteen's own.)

The great exception among Springsteen albums is *Tunnel of Love*, the wrenching diary of his first marriage and romantic disillusionment recorded (without the E Street Band) in 1987. It is subtle, complex music for adult consumption. For some reason, Springsteen performs none of its songs in concert these days, as far as I know. In recent years he has returned to his old role-playing, to his habit of writing almost exclusively about others, people much like the members of his audience. I once had a conversation about this with an old friend of mine, another longtime Springsteen fan. "I love Springsteen, because he's so down to earth—he's so real," my friend said. "I don't care if he has a fake Southern accent or if he doesn't sing about his own life. Who wants to hear about his kids and his art collection and how much fun he has traveling around the world? He reminds me of me, or how I wish I were, and I love that, because I don't really know myself, anyway." Then again, perhaps my friend didn't say that, exactly. He is deceased now, so who knows? The point is that we agree with each other, whatever we say—even if we're dead, literally or otherwise—because this is America, or so says Robert Coles. ■

LEE SIEGEL ON TELEVISION

What Was K Street?

SO MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about the growing resemblance between Hollywood and Washington, especially in the light of HBO's weird **K STREET**, that it is easy to forget that Hollywood and Washington are in fact very different places. There are the superficial similarities, of course. Actors and politicians have to manufacture a persona to prevail. Fiction is more convincing, and more profitable in votes and dollars, than reality. Lies are more expedient than truths. It is better to be a mirror than to look good in one. But all these shortcuts to success obtain almost everywhere now. They are the standard features of the presentation of self in everyday life.

Even without the conscious intention to deceive, everyone acts, everyone performs, no one tells the whole dismaying or self-exposing truth all the time. But nobody wants to admit it. It would mean that you are a bad person, an "actor," an "operator," a very "political" sort of character. America is the only country in the world where the ordinary tactics of the socialized self are decreed by society to be anti-social. And the funny consequence of that perception is that since socialized habits are considered inauthentic and anti-social, then deliberate anti-social acts such as fabrication and lying, which shatter the social pretenses and affirm the authenticity of the individual, are more and more regarded as legitimate paths to social ascent.

This is where reality television comes in. Fiction—*The West Wing*, for example—frankly announces its difference from reality and then tries to get its imagined experiences as close to reality as it can (which has the entertaining consequence, in the case of Aaron Sorkin's show, of much unreality); but reality television pretends to be "real" and then distorts reality before your very eyes. As the "reality" trend becomes more routinized, as it becomes an uncontroversially valid mode of entertainment, deceit replaces fiction and a calculating practical intelligence replaces the imagination. *K Street* sent actors into real political situations to interact with real political figures, sometimes actually changing the events with which the show got entangled. Steven Soderbergh and George Clooney's little show never really figured out if it was inside or outside, fiction or documentary, newsy or deep-think. Also, it is cultural poison.

CRITICS DISMISSED *K STREET*'S blurring of fact and falsity as "nothing new," as nothing compared with what transpires on the Sunday morning political chat-shows, or to the blurring of fact and falsity that takes place in politics in general. This is way too jaded. (You could have a right-wing coup in Washington and the next day Frank Rich would wearily write that it is just *Seven Days in May* all over again.) A couple of commentators even likened the series's mix of actors with actual politicians and lobbyists to "what Shakespeare did," forgetting I guess that Henrys Four, Five, and Six were based on historical figures, not on actual, living figures. Just about everybody observed that the show demonstrated the starstruck quality of Washington-based politicians, that it exposed their mad, Schumeresque addiction to the camera, their abject hunger to be embraced by the pretty Hollywood crowd. But *K Street* really was something new. It was not one more phase of the intertwining of politics and entertainment. It represented the very un-entertaining miscomprehension of both.

The premise of *K Street* was pretty original and must have struck HBO's executives as a promising idea. Clooney

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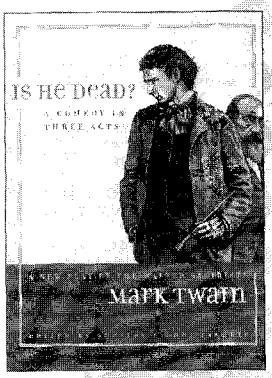
When the Thought Counts



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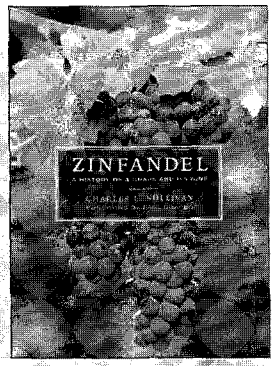

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said that he and Soderbergh were inspired by the old Fred Friendly "Ethics in America" series, an absorbing public television round table that assembled experts from different fields and had a prominent law professor create for them roles in a hypothetical moral conundrum. In that vein, he and Soderbergh came up with a fictional lobbying firm called Bergstrom Lowell. They got two real Washington operators, James Carville and Mary Matalin, to play the fictional lobbyists who run the firm, and three actors to play Carville and Matalin's associates. The idea, I assume, was to give the five created characters—two real lobbyists (except that Carville and Matalin are not real lobbyists, they are merely p. r. flacks of the sort that fill the saloons of Los Angeles and Manhattan) pretending to be real lobbyists, and two fake lobbyists pretending to be real ones—the outline of a situation with some kind of ethical tension, à la Fred Friendly, and send them out into the real world of Beltway politics to provoke candid responses from otherwise canny and concealing people.

In the first episode, Carville accepted an invitation to serve as a consultant to Howard Dean, who was preparing for a candidates' debate in Baltimore. This was supposed to provide some kind of ethical friction, since Bergstrom Lowell was a firm with clients from both parties and its employees were not supposed to engage in any partisan work such as helping a Democratic presidential candidate. So there were Carville and Matalin, who brought to the peak of noisome imperfection their Ralph and Alice Cramden bipartisan squabbling couple routine, fighting over the propriety of Carville's decision. These people have scruples, you know. Carville ended up going to Baltimore and along with the actually existing Paul Begala helped to prep Dean, and suddenly the producers of *K Street* struck insider gold. When Carville suggested to Dean that he use a joke referring to Trent Lott, Dean actually used the line in a real debate, and the press—the actually existing press—had a field day the next morning.

Here, at last, seemed to be a genuine moral dilemma worthy of a public television round table. Should a real candidate appear on a quasi-fictional show and use a line suggested by a real person pretending to be the person he actually is? Shouldn't the earnest and progressive Dean be more careful about phony media contrivances? (And he had the nerve to announce in a subsequent presidential debate that he is not "scripted"!) But in fact the show was a little like that old science-fiction movie *The Puppet Masters*, in which a small town is invaded by alien pod-people who are indistinguishable from the real people, until you get up close and see how really bizarre they are. Was Carville a real person or a pod person, an actual political consultant playing an actual role or an actual political consultant playing an actual political consultant who really wasn't actual at all? It cramps the brain, as Wittgenstein said.

RATHER THAN CREATING AN ethical dilemma, Soderbergh and Clooney fomented a new venue for an old opportunity. Dean's appropriation simply belied every platitude about the symbiosis between Hollywood and Washington and, incidentally, blew the show's premise out from underneath it. Rather than ethically stumbling, Dean proved that showbiz smoothies are no match for political smoothies. Offered some good free advice from a professional operator, he took it. Cynical, sophisticated *K Street* became a public relations bonanza for the cynical, sophisticated politicians who appeared on it. In later segments, we got Orrin Hatch using his moment on the show to give a boilerplate speech on the sacredness of intellectual property in the context of illegally downloaded music from the internet, and Charles Schumer on the importance of standing up to the Saudis, and Tom Daschle on the importance of ethanol to the environment. Even Rick Santorum got a chance to renovate his unlovely image by expressing impish outrage at Carville's sudden partisan eruption: since Carville was such an obnoxious narcissist on the show, whose obsession with "James Carville" shrank him into a parochial absurdity, Santorum gave the appearance of being principled and cosmopolitan in his protest against Carville. Every politician who appeared on the show, whether Democrat or Republican, left with his or her carefully spun image intact. Clearly the advice they were getting is worth paying for.

Soderbergh and Clooney traveled to Washington to make a show that would, as *K Street*'s ads proclaimed, present "politics from the inside out," a series that would catch the sordid sellouts and compromises lying at the hidden foundation of political power; but instead they ended up, show after show, playing the politicians' game in order to win the politicians' presence. (Also the presence of real journalists; but that's a whole other Fred Friendly exercise.) The free airtime that Soderbergh and Clooney brought to town proved magnetic and irresistible, and the two producers kept doling it out because they seemed flattered by, and not at all suspicious of, the attention. Clooney-sightings became the sport of the season in Washington. The show had a Spago feel from beginning to end, not least owing to its peculiar obsession with restaurants, all of whose names were the most prominent detail of any of the numerous scenes that took place inside them. The lobbying firm should have been called Bergstrom Lowell Zagat.

SO THE BELTWAY TURNED HOLLYwood's image of its own importance back against itself. Insofar as politicians do find something alluring about film stars beyond the opportunity to ride the coattails of their popularity and their visibility, it is probably that unlike congressmen, or senators, or even presidents, Hollywood celebrities are eternal incumbents. Actors do their work in blatant fictions against which there is no opposing, exposing force. Politicians are constantly running up against the public record and the rival politicians who want their seat. Contrary to all the pseudo-sophisticated blather about how politics is only about appearance, there really is no comparison between the reality level of a movie and the reality level of a campaign. The greater quantity of reality in politics is owed not least to the magnitude of the stakes, which cannot be meaningfully compared to, say, a weekend's grosses. And this is even more true of government than of politics. Government is a smart, serious, highly technical affair. Policies and laws may be good or bad, right or wrong, but they are not made of bullshit. So the unwitting effect of *K Street* was to make its few genuine glimpses of Washington endow the capital with real depth and seriousness.

For the best segments were when *K Street*'s documentary dimension gained the upper hand—in the episode, for example, when lobbyists for an energy company met with a couple of Bergstrom Lowell people to strategize over how the company might represent them. If you

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read between the lines of what Jack Quinn, a powerful Washington operator, was saying, if you studied his language, you might have begun to grasp some of the texture of Beltway culture. Although Washington, like any political center, brims with intrigue and double-dealing, especially in a time of military conflict—a few of *K Street*'s episodes took up the Joseph Wilson affair—the dismaying fact from an entertainment point of view is that most of what happens in D.C. is the homely business of hammering out legislation. Even more dramatically dismaying is that most people involved in the unglamorous fashioning of the nation's laws are fairly principled, industrious, and good at what they do. A patient, dogged, conscientious camera, through the accumulation of ordinary details, could reveal the particular human tincture of these people's days and nights, except that no serious lobbyist or legislator would allow the camera to observe them at what they really do when they are at work.

SODERBERGH'S FIRST FILM, *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*, made his reputation as much for its title as for his jerky, handheld camera-style. In later films such as *The Limey*, *Erin Brockovich*, and *Traffic*, sex and lies became Soderbergh's trademark themes. So when he landed in Washington, Soderbergh went looking for his trusty subjects in his chosen locale. But it is easier to find sex and lies at your local gym than it is running around with a little camera outside a congressional hearing room. So the director loaded his camera with his themes. Some Hollywood stars might have complained during the Lewinsky scandal that the media reduced a political conflict to a narrative about sex, but when Hollywood arrives on the shores of Washington it looks only for narratives about sex. It sets out to expose the fleshpots of transportation legislation.

Soderbergh and Clooney taped each show just three days before airtime in hopes of lighting a buzz off the flame of current headlines, which was itself a misunderstanding of their subject: lobbyists do not hang on the nightly news, public relations people do. Lobbyists are paid to be single-minded; public relations people are paid to buzz. But their conceit of weekly contemporaneity notwithstanding, Soderbergh and Clooney imposed on *K Street* their own hackneyed movie-narrative, which was constantly upstaging

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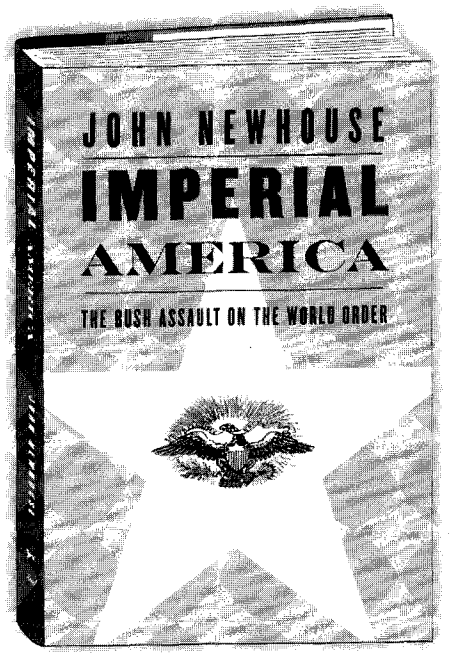

The *N.Y. Times* calls the book **"A double-barreled attack on American war policy."** "Mr. Newhouse's indictment of Bush's foreign policy," writes Charles A. Kupchan, "appears at an opportune moment, offering a lucid & accessible account of how he says the administration has done more to imperil the United States than to enhance its security... Newhouse recounts the lost opportunities arising from Bush's fixation on Saddam Hussein. The list is long and troubling."

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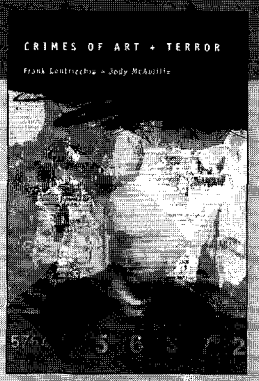

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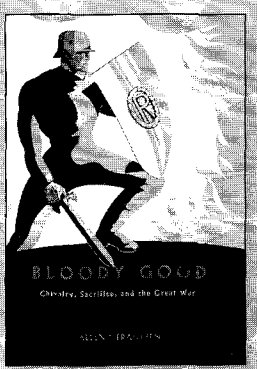

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the headlines, which in turn vanished from the show every time the poor actors opened their mouths to improvise dialogue, as in this scintillating cell-phone exchange: "I'm just walking down the street." "That's nice." The flatness is not interesting; it is flat. The first episode began with a shot right out of film school: an expensive shoe being carefully polished. The vanity of power that will do anything to prevail and be served, don't you know. Of course, there is a more complicated tale about how the ego really loves to ride to power without abandoning its principles; but never mind, that is a different arc.

The shoe belonged to a character wonderfully named Francisco Dupre, one of the show's three fictional characters, and the mainspring of Soderbergh and Clooney's superimposed story. We learned as the series progressed that the sleazy and enigmatic Dupre, beautifully played by Roger Guenveur Smith, was foisted on Carville and Matalin by the remote Bergstrom, and Dupre became the "secret" that Soderbergh was unable to find in the thickets of D.C. politics. Once in the firm, he seemed to be following his own agenda, making mysterious phone calls, forging mysterious connections with Saudi royalty in an episode that tried to hitch itself to breaking news about Saudi complicity with terrorist plots against the United States, meeting with the mysterious Bergstrom—performed with surprising aimlessness by Elliott Gould—whose motives for pushing Dupre on the firm and then secretly meeting with him in Bergstrom's Brooklyn apartment were undisclosed to the viewer. Maybe they were also undisclosed to Gould.

But the pressure on Soderbergh and Clooney to be real, as well as to be narratively interesting, made it impossible for them to fabricate a full-fledged mystery, because that would have dominated the series and gotten in the way of their verismo. So instead they created a storyline that was incomprehensible, an ongoing incoherence that had the feel of a secret but not the substance. As the politics disappointed with its mundane routines, the incoherence (i.e. lies) got ramped up with the personal dramas of the fictional characters (i.e. sex).

By the series's last two episodes, the politics, such as it was, had been replaced altogether by inexplicable ghosts of Soderbergh's earlier films, sent in like reinforcements: a ménage à trois with call girls in Las Vegas, the mysterious suicide of a young woman in a hotel bathroom, vague hints of a lesbian affair, the *Erin Brockovich*–like persecution of Bergstrom Lowell by invisible government powers. You began to wonder if the "K" in the series's title didn't stand for "kitchen sink." In the final episode nothing happened over and over again: the finale was like a filibuster aimed at disapproving HBO executives. The season ended with empty shots at Bergstrom Lowell, which I assume was meant to signify the emptiness at the core of the business of politics, but in truth was more like *K Street*'s own logo.

THIS CONCEPTUAL MESS, INCIdentally, fit perfectly with the series's attention-deficient camera. All the shaking frames nearly made me race to the medicine cabinet for my Dramamine. Isn't it the case that the revelation of truth requires a stable perspective? But not for Soderbergh. Before serious subjects he literally trembled. To be sure, he stood still sometimes, lingering with portentous duration on a single shot, or cut away with portentous suddenness, always implying that something profound was going on when nothing remotely profound was going on—much the way, in fact, a politician's smile implies goodness, or his sweeping phrase implies profundity, or his assertive declamation implies commitment, when nothing of the sort is going on. But then the fits and starts returned, and we were invited to experience a film-school variety of disequilibrium.

In other words, having come to Washington to call Washington's bluff, Soderbergh and Clooney found only their own Hollywood reflection, and reproduced the evasive and appearances-driven mentality that they hoped to expose. Soderbergh's furtive, catch-me-if-you-can camera was a Hollywood spinmeister's dream. And the most baldfaced political lie could not rise to the dimensions of the deceit of having the fictional (but real, but fictional, but real) Carville speak at an actual rally for John Street in Philadelphia, or having the fictional Dupre speak at a real dinner for the Children's Defense Fund, at which a real young black burn victim was praised for her courage. Neither Street's supporters nor the patrons of the CDF knew that they were listening carefully to and applauding phony people who had no intention of actually communi-

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cating with them. As for the brave young woman, her experience and her testimony were being trivialized and negated even as her story moved the crowd to high feeling.

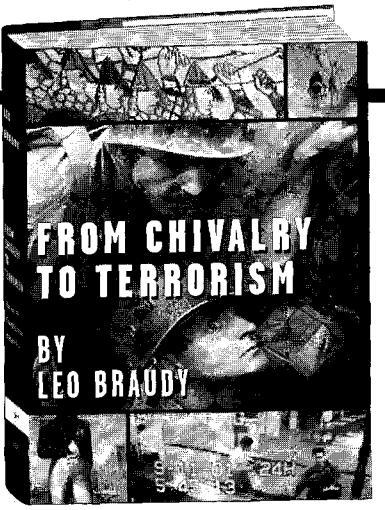
A symbiosis between Hollywood and Washington? Nonsense. If Soderbergh and Clooney knew how much the Beltway connivers were playing them like salmon, they would lie down on bagels and die. Celebrity is no match for real power. California voters did not get hoodwinked by a hollow actor with nary a substantial political idea in his head. They got hoodwinked by the pols and the fat-cats who manipulated a vain and ludicrous movie star for their own purposes. As I write this, Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston are on their way to the Middle East to make peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. "We can't allow that," they said of the savagery of recent years. Somewhere in that tortured land, as in the entire city of *K Street*–obsessed Washington, someone is slapping someone else on the back. ■

JED PERL ON ART

Bookings

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LIBRARIES exude a bookish rapture, and no libraries have more of this luminous poetry than the glorious confections, all polished wood and shining stone and white-and-gold stucco, that royal families and religious orders built in the eighteenth century, mostly in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Working in a Europe where the late afternoon of the baroque was passing ever so swiftly into the giddy morning of the rococo, a legion of gifted architects and sculptors and painters and craftsmen created spaces in which vast bookcases are shaped into concavities and convexities, transforming row upon row of precious volumes into rooms that are as surprisingly curved and curled as the interiors of gigantic sea shells. What may strike a contemporary visitor is the visual openness of these libraries, with the center of the room left as bare as a ballroom's parquet, and the walls ringed with the surge of books, rimmed with statuary and decorative carvings, and completed by an elaborately painted ceiling. The effect is intellectual heedlessness—which can be a shock to anybody who has grown up in the libraries of later generations, where the tightly-packed rows of bookcases, filling a space from end to end, suggest not a visual frolic but the austere geometry of a classical temple.

In **THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LIBRARIES IN THE WORLD** (Abrams, $50), one of this season's crop of picture books, you will find the Benedictine abbey library of Admont, where the white-painted bookcases are topped with the wonderful drumrolls and flourishes of gilt ornamentation, the more opulent monastic library at Wiblingen, with columns painted to imitate red and green stone and an entire congregation of twisting, turning allegorical figures, and the abbey library of Saint Gall, where the lustrous browns and tans of carved and inlaid wood bookcases harmonize with the old leather bindings to create a mellow exultation. In the royal libraries that were built in the eighteenth century in Vienna, in Prague, and in Mafra, Portugal, architects pushed even further, creating interiors in which the serried ranks of books take on a symphonic power that suggests an intellectual riposte to the glittery aura of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. *The Most Beautiful Libraries*, with admirably lucid photographs by Guillaume de Laubier and an intelligent text by Jacques Bosser, reaches back to the Renaissance and forward to the democratic vistas of the New York Public Library. The book does not include buildings by several of the greatest architects who have taken an interest in library design; there is nothing by Borromini, nothing by Alvar Aalto, and Michelangelo's Laurentian Library is missing. And while there isn't a library in the book that you could really call cozy, there are spaces—the John Rylands library in Manchester, the Trinity College library in Dublin—that suggest the austerity of scholarly work. As for the abbey libraries of the eighteenth century, they



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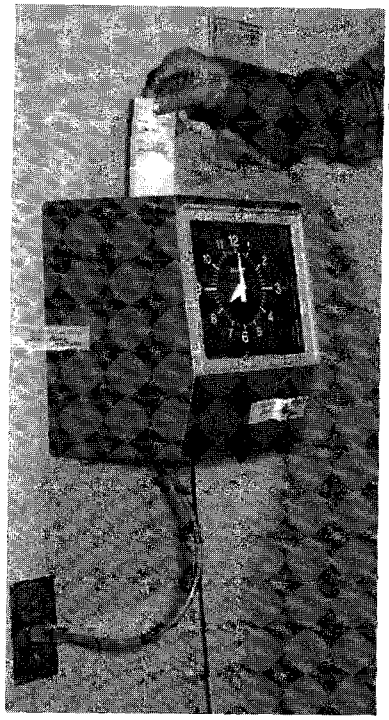

Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980–1981 (Time Piece), 11 April 1980–11 April 1981.* Photograph: Michael Shen.

work ethic

HELEN MOLESWORTH

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are Europe's greatest salute to the teeming exaltation of bookishness, to the times when a passage that you've read gets you so excited that your mind careens upward, higher and higher, into the cloud-swagged empyrean that was so often painted on the ceilings of these unimaginably playful places of study.

LIKE THE BEAUTIFULLY APPOINTED library, the beautifully printed or bound volume can suggest a celebration of what is most essential in a book. And the eighteenth century was not only a great time for libraries, it was also a halcyon period for book illustration, with extraordinary works produced, to limit ourselves to France alone, by painters such as Oudry and Boucher and by dazzlingly gifted graphic artists such as Eisen, Gravelot, and Cochin *fils*, who are nowadays known only to specialists. The art-for-art's-sake frivolity of some of this work struck a special chord among artists and connoisseurs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of the modern artists who sought to bring back into book illustration a rococo wit was Raoul Dufy, a giant whose paintings and graphic works remain terribly undervalued. Dufy's revival of the eighteenth-century vignette in a long series of woodcut illustrations produced in the first quarter of the twentieth century remains too little appreciated. While his illustrations for Apollinaire's *Le Bestiaire, ou Cortège d'Orphée* (1911) are frequently discussed, much more could be said about his transcendent stenciled illustrations for Mallarmé's *Madrigaux* (1920), with evocations of a fashionably dressed woman and a corner of a room and a painter at an easel so precise that they resurrect, in a series of flashes, a whole lost world of nineteenth-century moods, modes, and mentalities. Another of Dufy's remarkable experiments in illustration, **MON DOCTEUR LE VIN** (Yale University Press, $19.95), originally published in 1936, is back in print, so there is a chance that this wonderfully silly book that has had a cult following among a few Dufy fanatics will at last reach the audience that it deserves, although the reduced format and the imperfect clarity of the reproductions provide only an echo of the original edition, designed by the legendary graphic artist Cassandre.

Mon Docteur le Vin was produced as an elaborate brochure by the wine merchant Etienne Nicolas, whose shops are still familiar in France. The text, by Gaston Derys, consists of a series of arguments, reinforced by the opinions of medical specialists, for the beneficial effects of wine—which turns out to be good for childhood ailments, as a treatment for typhoid fever and diabetes and appendicitis and obesity, as a morale booster, as a stimulant for athletes, and as a spur to creativity among artists and writers. To accompany these heaped-high encomia, Dufy provides a series of watercolors whose subject is the sociability of French life: the teeming railroad stations and parks and sports events and government receptions and auction rooms and galleries and theaters, as well as, of course, the endless meals eaten in cozily crowded rooms or out-of-doors, beneath tree-dappled skies.

The throwaway charm of Dufy's watercolor technique is backed up by reserves of compositional know-how. Take a look at the lower right corner of the illustration for "Wine as a treatment for diabetes," in which the grouping of two dogs and a seated man, his head tipped way back, creates a drama of tilting triangles that sets the entire picture in motion with a confidence that Rubens could not have improved upon. And Dufy brings to the self-evidently over-the-top claims of *Mon Docteur le Vin* exactly the kind of easygoing, let-a-bit-of-the-wind-out-of-their-sails wisdom that the book needs. You can see that Dufy is laughing, or at least winking, at this fantasy that wine is a universal panacea, and yet at the same time he understands the need for this fantasy and goes right ahead and celebrates it. There is something in Dufy's exacting yet upbeat spirit that recalls Jean Renoir: these artists take the precise measure of their fellow men, but ever so gently.

IF DUFY'S GRAPHIC ACHIEVEMENTS have been overlooked, this is in part because there are such endless riches to be found among the illustrated books and periodicals of the twentieth century that it can be easy to leave whole areas out of consideration. Steven Heller's **MERZ TO EMIGRE AND BEYOND: AVANT-GARDE MAGAZINE DESIGN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY** (Phaidon, $75) is an excellently produced book that tracks the graphic gorgeousness of experimental magazines across the twentieth century. Although Heller shows us flashes of the rococo-revival in early modern circles—you see it in the illustrations in

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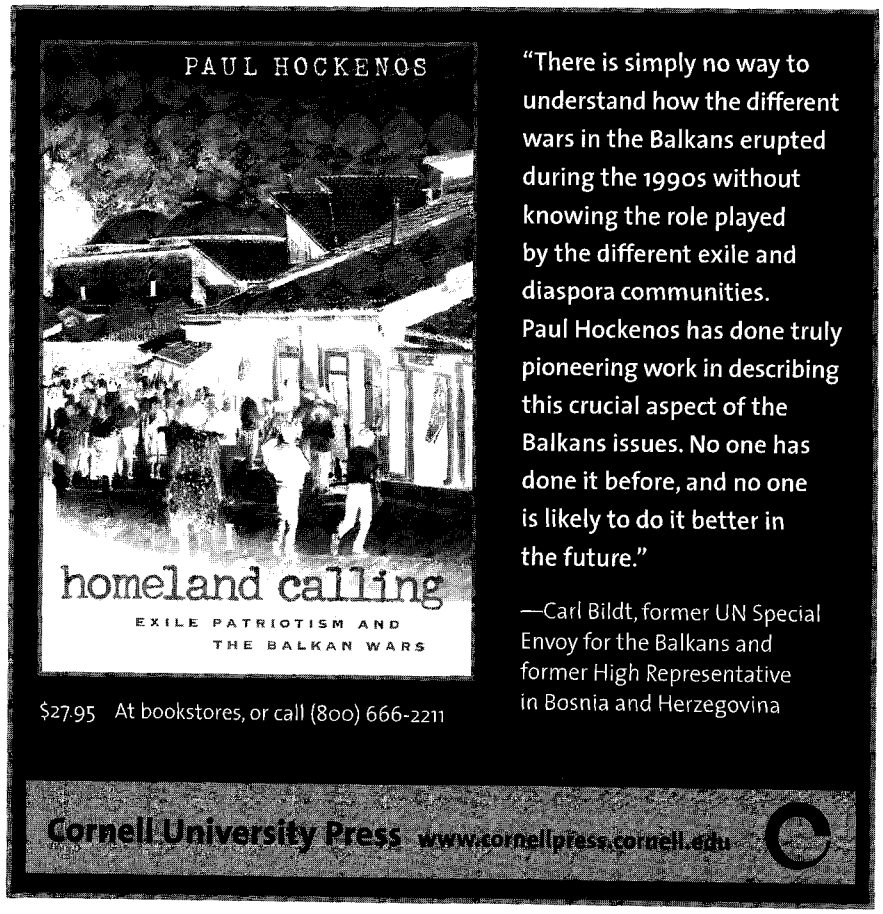
Das Plakat, a German magazine published between 1910 and 1921—what Heller emphasizes is modern austerity and angularity and a collagist sensibility that yields results ranging from the constructivist to the surrealist. Heller presents covers and double-page spreads in periodicals ranging from early twentieth-century productions such as *Broom*, *Futurismo*, *Dada*, *Merz*, *Der Sturm*, *Neue Jugend*, and *De Stijl* to mid-century works including *PM*, *View*, *VVV*, *Art d'Aujourd'Hui*, *Bizarre*, and *Portfolio*. And we begin to see that the very look of each magazine reflects not only a particular aesthetic, but also a particular kind of sociability and a particular view of the world.

Heller takes the story through the alternative press of the 1960s and right up to the present, but the point is not so much the narrative as the opportunity to come in close contact with the images themselves. This is, I think, equally true for Gian Carlo Calza's **HOKUSAI** (Phaidon, $95), a finely printed volume that provides us with a close look at Hokusai's huge achievement, including his published sketchbooks, the *Manga*, as well as many other illustrated books, among them erotic images in which a lyric voluptuousness proves to be entirely consistent with a no-holds-barred sex-manual literalness. Calza's account of Hokusai concludes with a chapter about the artist's impact on nineteenth-century French art, and Hokusai's bold attack, both in black-and-white and in color, can also seem to vibrate deep into the twentieth century, with its echoes felt in the bracing clearheadedness of many of the designs that Heller includes in *Merz to Emigre and Beyond*.

WHEN WE APPROACH CERtain large, unruly subjects—the history of the modern magazine or the place of fashion in culture—we may find that a book offers a better introduction than an exhibition, for as we turn the pages we are able to grasp the subject as a whole. The value of Isabelle Denamur's **MOROCCAN TEXTILE EMBROIDERY** (Flammarion, $60) is that she presents us not only with color photographs of these magnificent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cloths but also with vintage photographs, mostly late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, of women wearing the clothes, so that we understand the densely worked decorative surfaces not only as two-dimensional arabesques but also as sculptural objects, alive in time and space. While these Moroccan textiles draw on what is perhaps the most sophisticated decorative arts tradition in the world, a tradition that has its origins in the ancient Middle East, they have a folkloric bluntness, a likeably brash spirit. It's as if the whispered subtleties of a Persian carpet had been crossed with the spirited naïveté of an early American sampler. The decorative excess of these silk-embroidered Moroccan shawls and turbans and sashes and door hangings and tablecloths is almost comically gleeful. Islamic geometry is given a refreshingly blunt attack.

While some may feel that it is stretching the point to see comic high spirits in the decorative work of Moroccan women, nobody can doubt that the comedy of fashion was an abiding theme for Elsa Schiaparelli, the designer who is the subject of a book, **SHOCKING!: THE ART AND FASHION OF ELSA SCHIAPARELLI** (Yale University Press, $65) that accompanies an exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through January 4. Schiaparelli earned her toehold in the history of art through collaborations with Dalí, including a dress fabric decorated with lobsters, a crustacean that the poshest of the Surrealists incorporated in his work during the 1930s. But her place in the twentieth-century adventure transcends her witty allusions to Dalí, Cocteau, Meret Oppenheim, and countless others, for Schiaparelli knew what the very best of her artist friends also knew, which is that style must always express structure—that style, if it is to have meaning, is an effect of structure.

In Schiaparelli's work, there is always an underlying logic to the fizz of decorative embroidery or the tongue-in-cheek flashiness of the fabric design. She uses her flights of fancy to emphasize the lithe, swaggering bodies of the coolly yet humorously sexy women who wore her amazing clothes. Despite her passion for trompe l'oeil gags—the scarves designed to mimic newsprint, the evening gowns made of silks printed with regimental flags, the dinner suit embroidered with mirrors to echo the interiors of Versailles—she never lost a formalist's instinct for the basic question, which for a designer of clothes is how to make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people look good. In *Shocking!*—the word describes a particularly vivid pink that she favored—Schiaparelli comes across as a woman who through her tireless attention to the craft of fashion made something imperishable out of the exigencies of dress.

If Schiaparelli's most extravagant inventions are forever associated with the high bohemia of the years between the wars—with Dalí's glossy Surrealism and Cocteau's Neo-Romanticism—one of the earliest works in *Shocking!*, a 1928 sweater in black, white, and red, with a trompe l'oeil collar and bow knitted right into the fabric, suggests the astringency of the Constructivist tradition—of Cubist collage, Russian avant-garde graphics, Sonia Delaunay's fabrics, and Bauhaus weavings. There were quite a few artists in early twentieth-century Europe who believed that the revolutionary implications of abstract art had swept aside the old distinctions between painting and sculpture and architecture and design. And the result, so many believed, was going to be a new, more thoroughly integrated understanding of the visual world. Such ideas circulated at the Bauhaus, and when Hitler's rise to power sent some of the artists and architects who had worked at the Bauhaus to the United States, this dream of a unified theory of the arts took hold in various places in the states, including Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where Josef and Anni Albers arrived in the 1930s. **Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art** (MIT Press, $75) is the English version of the catalogue of a show mounted at the Reina Sofía in Madrid last year, and Vincent Katz, who edited the volume and wrote a good deal of the text, gets at the catalytic complexity of an institution that stands at the crossroads of mid-twentieth-century American culture.

Black Mountain College has the richness of a scrapbook—a scrapbook devoted to the works and days of the extended family of mid-twentieth-century American experimentation. The college brought together creative spirits from several different continents and several different generations, and what held everybody together was a belief in elective affinities—in the freely chosen community of artistic individuals that was an American re-imagining of the revolutionary artistic spirit of romantic Europe in the early nineteenth century. Among the figures who moved through Black Mountain, either as teachers or students, either during the winter sessions or the summer sessions, were Josef and Anni Albers, Ruth Asawa, Eric Bentley, Ilya Bolotowsky, John Cage, Robert Creeley, Merce Cunningham, Fielding Dawson, Robert Duncan, Buckminster Fuller, Lou Harrison, Fannie Hillsmith, Alfred Kazin, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert de Niro, Charles Olson, Robert Rauschenberg, Dorothea Rockburne, Roger Sessions, Aaron Siskind, David Tudor, Cy Twombly, Peter Voulkos, Susan Weil, and Jonathan Williams. Like any immensely complex family saga, this one bears telling and re-telling, and Katz's book adds colorings and shadings to the excellent accounts that we already have in Martin Duberman's *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, Mary Emma Harris's *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, and Dawson's resonant memoir, *The Black Mountain Book*. Of special value in the new volume are the pages on "Olson and Black Mountain College" by Creeley, the poet whose recollections of the mid-century years, collected in a small group of lyrical essays, are never less than extraordinary. "What I first saw," Creeley recalls of meeting Olson, "was this very big man, clothed only with a towel, still wet from the shower, saying and gesturing, come in, come in! In I went and moments later, it seemed, we were altogether engaged with talking of all that our letters had touched on and worked to locate—writing, magazine, person, history, presence, conjecture." That was Black Mountain College.

Black Mountain had an incalculable importance for the development of the modern crafts traditions in America. Anni Albers brought an unsparing formalist vision to the art of the loom, and a revival of Asian pottery techniques that was having an international impact in the second quarter of the century was also felt at the college. What makes the Black Mountain story so difficult to tell is that it is part of a larger story of how modern art's back-to-the-basics spirit could reinvigorate pre-industrial techniques, with repercussions that were felt from the triumphs of Scandinavian design to the revival by Isamu Noguchi and others of traditional Japanese crafts. **Nature Form & Spirit: The Life and Legacy of George Nakashima** (Abrams, $75) turns our attention to a large figure in this story, the Japanese-American woodworker who knew how to bend his own will to a formal necessity that emerged from the very grain of the exquisite pieces of walnut, cherry, oak, laurel, and rosewood out of which he crafted his tables and chairs and benches. Written by Nakashima's daughter, Mira Nakashima, who has directed his studio in New Hope, Pennsylvania since his death in 1990, *Nature Form & Spirit* reflects the plainspoken idealism that you feel in the beautifully polished tops of Nakashima's tables, with their surprising forms that are nothing more or less than a section of the trunk of a great old tree, and their finely inlaid butterfly clamps, often in a contrasting wood, that reinforce natural cracks and fissures and double as decorative punctuation. When Nakashima gave the Mies van der Rohe lectures at the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1977, he said that "my relationship to furniture and construction is basically my dialogue with a tree, with a complete and psychic empathy." Some readers may recoil from the unabashed romanticism of this view, but when you turn to Nakashima's work, you can see that he believed every word that he said. This man was a demanding, disciplined romantic. "Since design need not be a (personal) expression," he continued, "the functions of construction become primary." Even people who know Nakashima's furniture may close this book with a deepened admiration for the man, because we are also presented with a generous selection of his architectural experiments, among them his own New Hope home and the addition that he made to the house of Ben and Bernarda Shahn.

I am not sure that there has ever been a time when so many engaging books about the twentieth-century decorative arts were coming off the presses. **Bent Ply: The Art of Plywood Furniture** (Princeton Architectural Press, $45), by Dung Ngo and Eric Pfeiffer, contains a useful technological history and a good selection of furniture, ranging from Aalto and Eames to new designs, including a beautifully severe dining table by Jens Denecke; but what is going to make this volume a must for design-book collectors is the binding, which consists of two sheets of stout, blond plywood, the front one niftily stamped with the title in black and green. **Marimekko: Fabrics Fashion Architecture** (Yale University Press,

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$75), the catalogue of an exhibition that is at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts through February 15, promises a walk down memory lane for the youth-oriented intellectual set of the early 1960s, who flocked to the Design Research stores in Cambridge, New York, and San Francisco, where they loaded up on the brilliant, big-scaled Marimekko textiles that were made into pillows, dresses, tablecloths, wall hangings, and curtains emblazoned with snaky stripes and stylized flowers.

The popularity of the Marimekko designs—and the Design Research stores that marketed Marimekko in the United States—is now being interpreted historically, as one of a succession of more or less successful attempts to give mass-produced industrial products a freestanding distinction. In the past few years, it has been the Ikea superstores that have been re-interpreting modern design, at prices infinitely more affordable than those of the old Design Research, where in spite of the youthful ambience you needed the salary of a full professor to be able to afford anything larger than an ashtray. As for the investigations into the egalitarian spirit of the decorative arts that were pursued by old modern masters such as Picasso, Léger, Miró, and Chagall in the years after World War II, they never produced anything that was available at bargain prices, although the Picasso ceramics sold in limited editions by the Madoura Pottery in Vallauris were affordable enough to become for a time a sort of upper-middle-class souvenir of the postwar grand tour.

While the ceramics that Chagall produced, mostly in the 1950s, lack the feverish brilliance of Picasso's work, some of these lyrical tiles and vases and platters have a likeable and even seductive spirit. **Marc Chagall: Ceramic Masterpieces** (Prestel, $65), the English version of the catalogue of an exhibition held in Germany last summer, does not live up to its over-the-top title, but this beautifully produced volume, edited by Roland Doschka, certainly shows how a formidable artist works to find his own truth in an unfamiliar medium. Some of the most successful ceramics are the vases that sprout human figures and animal heads, so that the shapes begin to echo the fantastical, improvisatory zest of Chagall's draftsmanship. And in many of these works Chagall shows a likeably unfussy way with the glazes, a light touch that brings to mind the tossed-off deco-

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rations on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European folk pottery.

Although these ceramics are a divertimento in the master's later career, Chagall's post–World War II achievement is large enough to include a few frolics, and those who see only kitsch in the Jerusalem Windows and the cycle of biblical paintings in the Chagall museum in Nice are missing out on some signal modern achievements. As Meyer Schapiro wrote in 1956, in his essay on Chagall's illustrations for the Bible, "modern artists have greater resources than modernity allows them to disclose—resources which are often unsuspected by the artists themselves, who would welcome, we may venture to suppose, the prospect of great walls to cover or monuments to erect, and would not be at a loss for subjects worthy of this scale, if their art were open to all that they felt or loved." In his later years Chagall had embarked on precisely this quest.

WHILE THE DREAM OF THE unity of the arts recurs in every period, no group of creative spirits may have been as passionately devoted to that dream as the artists and architects of the baroque, and Giovanni Careri, a professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, salutes their dreams with an inspiriting fervor in a book titled simply **BAROQUES** (Princeton University Press, $75). The combination of Careri's fast-moving prose and Ferrante Ferranti's dramatically poised photographs makes for an experience that has some of the broad-brush exuberance of a top-notch survey course; Careri is not concerned about getting all the details right so long as he is true to the temper of the times. Scrupulous art historians may cringe at the sweeping themes that Careri aims to tackle in chapters entitled "Ecstasies," "Angels," "Vanities," and "Images of Power"—or at the way that he bounces from country to country. Yet this is a book that I would not hesitate to hand to a person whom I wanted to introduce to the intoxications of the baroque.

Careri's vehemence works with this most insistent of styles. And his meditations can be challenging. Writing about Pozzo's great, absurd illusionistic ceiling in Sant'Ignazio in Rome, Careri argues that there are theological implications in the very weakness of this vast perspectival construction. As visitors to Sant'Ignazio will recall, Pozzo's trompe l'oeil juggernaut only makes perfect visual sense when viewed from one location—when you're standing on that famous circle inlaid in the middle of the floor. Careri, in his eagerness to re-imagine Pozzo's awesome cleverness as something closer to genius, argues that when you move away from that point—and the perspective illusion collapses—you are reminded of "the vanity of the eye." That is a sly way to justify Pozzo's virtuoso turn. But nobody who remembers the first time that they experienced the madcap perspectival hijinks of Sant' Ignazio will be indifferent to Careri's ingenious remarks.

THE BAROQUE, LIKE THE GOTHIC before it, was an international style. And no city is as inextricably linked with this hyperbolic worldview as Rome, where the salient formal characteristics of the baroque—the oval and the spiral and the S-curve and the unification of spaces through a ceaseless process of visual elaboration—feel inevitable, as ordinary as breathing. There will always be a limit to how closely you want to link particular places with particular styles, and yet everybody will know what you mean if you say that a baroque sculpture embodies the spirit of Rome or an Impressionist painting embodies the spirit of Paris or a black and white photograph embodies the spirit of New York. Certainly **NEW YORKERS AS SEEN BY MAGNUM PHOTOGRAPHERS** (powerHouse, $45), edited by the Max Kozloff, catches the reckless extremes that define the melting pot city—and considering that the preponderance of the photographs in this collection are in black-and-white, the color images included begin to seem like sparks and fireworks set off by the dialectical clash of those colors that are no color and all color.

New Yorkers as Seen by Magnum Photographers is about as good a visual introduction to the frenzied enchantments of New York as I can imagine. The title of this collection of work by members of the legendary Magnum photo agency—they include Henri Cartier-Bresson, Bruce Davidson, Eve Arnold, Susan Meiselas, and many others—tells the story. By emphasizing the people rather than the place—New Yorkers rather than New York—Kozloff gets at the dizzying heterogeneity that New Yorkers accept as a sort of timeless value, as an abstraction by which they live. By rejecting a chronological organization in favor of a grouping of images in loose-knit themes—"Life is a Party," "On the Go," "Interiors," "Notables," and so forth—Kozloff suggests the peculiar collaging of periods, the almost time-warp quality that will strike a walker through this city where the Meatpacking District can today feel like a neighborhood that has forgotten everything before 2003, while the glittering skyscrapers of Park Avenue still hold some of the optimistic perfume of the 1950s, and the streets lined with townhouses just north of Washington Square remain locked in Greenwich Village's ancient nostalgia for its own forever retreating golden past. A few pages in *New Yorkers as Seen by Magnum Photographers* are devoted to images of 9/11, which is exactly right. The book is about why people come to New York, and why they stay here, and why, if they leave, they do not forget the times that they had here.

Another delicious look at New York is provided by **THIS IS NEW YORK** (Universe, $17.95), a reprint of one of a series of children's books by the Czech-born illustrator M. Sasek. Beginning in 1958 with *This is Paris*, Sasek brought his acute eye to cities around the world, producing *This is New York* in 1960 and, in 1962, **THIS IS SAN FRANCISCO** (also back in print from Universe, $17.95). Sasek's New York, a mingling of legendary landmarks and quotidian streetscapes, is exactly what a child would take away from a week in the city. Working with bright blocks of color in a bold but casual style, Sasek shows a city full of big-eyed, genial figures who make their way along streets that are a likeably unpredictable collage. Sasek includes all the monuments—the United Nations and the Statue of Liberty and the Brooklyn Bridge and Rockefeller Center and the Guggenheim Museum—but he also notices the fire hydrants and the heaps of Sunday papers at the newsstands and the hot dog vendors. Sasek loves the discordant layering of signage. "You can shop in any language," he announces, and shows us a German Brauhaus, a Spanish movie theater, a Jewish butcher, a Czech restaurant, a Hungarian hardware store, and an Italian pizzeria. He mixes up the big things and the little things. A page devoted to Chinatown includes, as a grace note in a corner, the profile of a man holding a Chinese newspaper. And Sasek shows us the exhilaration that people experience as they

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take their parts in the drama that is the city, whether they are workers on a picket line or kids playing in the streets.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS SOMETIMES show us things that books designed for adults pass over. Sasek's eye for the details of the Manhattan streetscape may recall the equally steady attention that Maurice Sendak brought to the plain-as-plain-can-be attached houses in Brooklyn where all the kids are growing up together in a book such as *The Sign on Rosie's Door*. Sendak's extraordinary career, first explored by Selma Lanes in 1980 in *The Art of Maurice Sendak*, is now the subject of a companion volume, **THE ART OF MAURICE SENDAK: 1980 TO THE PRESENT** (Abrams, $60), with a text by Tony Kushner. When Lanes published her book, Sendak was already a legendary figure who counted among his varied achievements dozens of children's books, collaborations with Randall Jarrell and Isaac Bashevis Singer, and two volumes—*Where the Wild Things Are* in 1963 and *In the Night Kitchen* in 1970—whose frank treatment of childhood fantasies and fears had stirred controversy among educators, psychologists, and cultural commentators that reached into the newspapers and newsmagazines where children's books are rarely discussed. While Sendak has never rejected his place in the public imagination, in recent years he has often pursued projects—illustrations to Melville's *Pierre* and Kleist's *Penthesilea* and sets for Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito*—that are so quirky or so erudite or so frankly experimental that many of them have scarcely registered among the audience that will forever think of Sendak as the King of the Wild Things.

What fame has given Sendak is absolute creative freedom. From time to time he still works in a high comic mode derived from the supercharged imagery of Winsor McCay's early twentieth-century comic strips. And Sendak can still shake up our sense of how kids are living, as in his 1993 examination of homelessness, *We Are All In The Dumps With Jack and Guy*. But increasingly in recent years, Sendak has turned away from the present in order to resurrect the phantasmagorical landscapes and talismanic domestic situations that date from the beginnings of the romantic myth of childhood, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the sets and the

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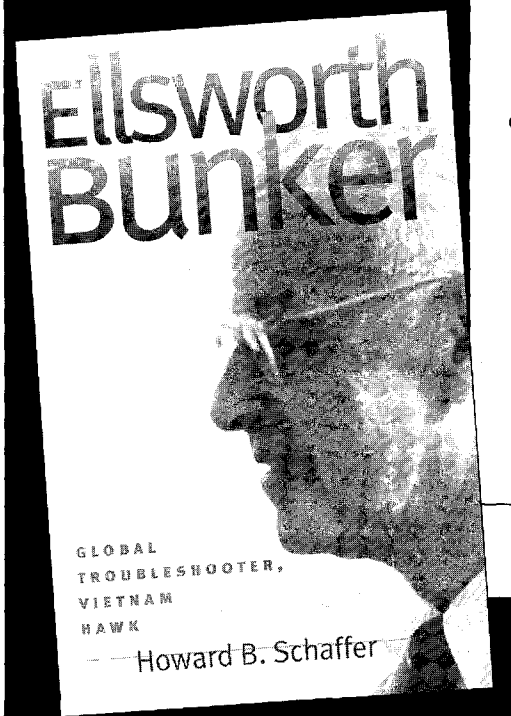

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costumes that he has designed for *The Nutcracker*, *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, *L'Heure Espagnole*, *The Magic Flute*, *Idomeneo*, and *La Clemenza di Tito*, Sendak has created a vision of childhood as a stylistic house of mirrors, in which the comforts of the humble bedroom in Rosie's house in Brooklyn overlap with the opulent art nouveau nursery in Ravel's opera, which in turn overlaps with the exotic garden room where Mozart, the boy genius, sits deep into the night, composing the sublime music for *The Magic Flute*. In his designs for Ravel and Mozart, Sendak gives into a yearning for a quirky, idiosyncratic architectural grandeur, for a spirit not unlike the spirit of the great rococo libraries of the eighteenth century, where bookishness was a kind of ecstasy. And surely we can imagine the remarkable expanse of Sendak's artistic production, so full of wild fantasy and delicious detail and serrated historical allusion, displayed on the curving shelves of one of those rococo libraries. There can be no better setting for the work of this artist who has done so much to honor the unquenchable dream of what can—and will—happen when you open the pages of a book. ■

Adam Kirsch

Toward the Truffle

THE COSMOS TRILOGY
by Frederick Seidel
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 208 pp., $15)

IT WOULD BE AN INTERESTING experiment to give Frederick Seidel's poems to a dozen different readers and ask them to describe the author. The result would be something like the fable in which blindfolded men describe an elephant after touching its legs or its trunk or its tail: one poet would fracture into a whole menagerie. Is Seidel the social climber who cranes his neck to admire "Episcopalians from the Golden Age/Of schools who loved to lose gracefully and lead?" Or the bosom friend of "Monsieur le Comte et Madame la Comtesse" de Gourcuff, his hosts at the Château of Fontenay? The teacher who rides the Manhattan subway to get to his classes? Or the jet-setter who takes the Concorde to Paris to buy shoes *faites sur mesure*? A violent misogynist, or an elegant seducer, or both?

As these examples show, the multitudes that Seidel contains are not exactly the kind that Whitman had in mind. His shifting identities are more like the disguises a fugitive might use to evade Interpol. For this reason, it is not a condemnation, as it would be of many other poets, to say that the major subject and interest of Frederick Seidel's poetry is Frederick Seidel. His name does not stand, as with so many confessional poets, for a cosseted ego or a set of cherished traumas; it is more like an intersection where anyone could be passing through:

> Combine a far-seeing industrialist
> With an Islamic fundamentalist.
> With an Italian premier who doesn't
> take bribes.
> With a pharmaceuticals CEO who
> loves to spread disease....
>
> And you get Fred Seidel.

By treating his name as an unstable signifier, Seidel approaches a kind of writing popular among younger poets today, many of whom delight in writing poems where the syntax of narrative persists in the absence of meaning: the poet seems to be telling you a story about him or herself, but it never makes sense. Where this is not simply a tic or a fad, it seems to be a theoretical statement about the way identity is constructed by discourse. A favorite device for making this point is the "I, I, I" poem, such as "Ezra's Lament" by Susan Wheeler: "I owed the baker three dollies with heads./I owed the singer a way to recoup./I owed the bookmaker my mother's own sauce." It is unlikely that Seidel directly influenced this kind of poetry—John Ashbery and C. D. Wright are more popular role models, and John Berryman wrote the first "I, I, I" poem, in "Dream Song #22." But such poets could certainly find in Seidel resemblances to their own concern for identity and incoherence. In fact, the first poem in *Area Code 212*—the third of the three linked collections now published in a single volume as *The Cosmos Trilogy*—is an "I, I, I" poem, called "I Do": "I do white gloves at the dances,/But I don't dance with the fascists./I do beat and smash their stupid wishes./I take you to be my."

Yet Seidel's real strangeness is not so abstract or academic. He is in fact one of the very rare contemporary poets who can be transgressive, not in the fashionable way of the seminar but in the disturbing way of the nightmare. Seidel is not essentially interested in identity at all, either as a biographical experience or as a theoretical issue. As he writes in *Life on Earth*, the middle book of the trilogy: "He didn't talk much about himself because there wasn't much to say." For Seidel, "the self"—that tediously eternal subject—is only a pencil-thin circumference. He is more interested in what lies outside (the social and political world) and what lies inside (the unconscious and the obsessive). In both realms, he is drawn to everything that is overripe, over-civilized, luxuriant to the point of putridity: to decadence, as an experience and an aesthetic. And against the odds, Seidel manages to transform decadence, that old pose, into the basis for a genuine and powerful poetry.

AMONG CONTEMPORARY POETS, it is Seidel's social interest that is most unusual. This is not simply a question of being up-to-date on current events, though many of his poems can be precisely dated. This is the mid–1980s, as seen in *These Days* (1989):

> Unshaved men in suits walk ahead of
> others in masks.
> It might be the men one sees strolling
> Together outside Claridge's in
> London followed
> At a submissive distance by their
> veiled wives,
> But in Central America—hostages
> and their slaves
> By relay satellite.

The poem is concerned not with information but with the experience of consuming information. This is one of those

Adam Kirsch is the author of THE THOUSAND WELLS: POEMS *(Ivan R. Dee).*

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experiences so elusive and significant that their conquest for poetry is a real achievement. Like most members of his class, Seidel looks down on television: "I never watch TV./But sometimes late at night" he deadpans in "At Gracie Mansion." But a poem such as "My Tokyo," the title poem of a collection that he published in 1993, is inconceivable without the experience of flipping channels:

New York is an electrical fire.
People are trapped on the top floor, smoking
With high-rise desire
And becoming Calcutta.

Tokyo is low
And manic as a hive.
For the middle of the night they have silent jackhammers.
Elizabethan London with the sound off. Racially pure with no poor.

Those silent jackhammers are just the kind of factoid about Tokyo that one might take away from a documentary or a *Newsweek* article, and even the syntax—"they have"—is what we use for the bored relation of novelties.

But more interesting, because more surprising, are the things and the people Seidel seems to know firsthand. And here we approach one of the most ambiguous elements of Seidel's decadent poetry: his apparent snobbery. He writes about his famous, rich, and well-born acquaintances, not with the ironic distance expected of intellectuals but with a Proustian delight. What are we to make of "Pressed Duck," his celebration of the fashionable Manhattan restaurateur Elaine Kaufman:

We were green as grapes,
A cluster of February birthdays,
All "Elaine's" regulars....
Elaine said, "Why do we need anybody else?
We're the world."

Here Seidel eagerly participates in a complacent Manhattan provincialism. In his best poems, however, his intimacy with this world of fashion and privilege is what allows him to be its effective satirist. If Seidel avidly lists his elegant tailors and shoemakers, he follows the list with this: "The well-dressed man... / Is a sunstream of urine on its way to the toilet bowl." If he visits "The Master Jeweler Joel Rosenthal," he is reminded that "Death is loading in the van/The women and camels of King Solomon it is repossessing."

SEIDEL HAS ALSO WRITTEN MANY poems in which the cast of characters, though rich and aristocratic, are effectively unknown, and thus avoid the banality of celebrity. There is "Rackets," which tells of Reginald Fincke, a "dashingly handsome" racquet-club champion of the 1910s; there is "In Memoriam," about the "Great-grandson of George Boole as in Boolean algebra." These sound like footnotes to the Social Register, but the effect is otherwise, as we can see in "Hugh Jeremy Chisholm" from *Area Code 212*:

With Jeremy Chisholm at the Lobster Inn on our way to Sagaponack,
Eating out on the porch in the heat, flicking cigarettes into the inlet.

Billy Hitchcock landed his helicopter at a busy gas station
In Southampton July 4th weekend...

Bessie Cuevas had introduced me to this *fin de race* exquisite ...
Who was as beautiful as the young Prince Yusupov

Who had used his wife as bait to kill Rasputin....

Each of these is doubtless a real person whom Seidel actually knows. But this catalogue of names—elegant, deracinated, faintly bizarre—seems to come not out of *Town and Country,* but out of "Gerontion" ("By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;/By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room/Shifting the candles; Fräulein von Kulp/Who turned in the hall...."). Here Eliot invokes one of the most dangerous tropes of decadence: a languid and corrupt cosmopolitanism, which can so easily provoke a reactive mania for purity. But Seidel's effect is at once less ethically problematic and more effectively alienating than Eliot's. We know that Eliot's people are invented to make his point, and they cannot help seeming stagy, whereas Seidel's are anonymously, repulsively real.

This effect is greatly increased by the context in which we read about Jeremy Chisholm and company, for in Seidel's poems almost every narrative is seen through a glass darkly. The outer, social world of his poetry is charged by its contact with an extremely strange inner climate, which Seidel explores with a boldness that is hard to distinguish from rashness. Almost uniquely among poets, Seidel does not scheme to make himself look good in his poems. Even when Berryman's alter ego Henry wonders if he could "end anyone and hacks her body up/and hide the pieces," the effect is to make us feel sorry for Berryman for having such tortured thoughts. But how should we feel about Seidel for having these thoughts?

The most beautiful power in the world has buttocks.
It is always a dream come true.
They are big. They are too big.
Kiss them and spank them till they are scalding.
Till she can't breathe saying oh....

Perhaps the only thing that could make such a poem more explosive is the title Seidel gives it: "AIDS Days." And the explosions start in the uncertainties, the information gaps. Who is the woman—a business executive, or (as appears possible later in the poem) the president of the United States, or a figure in a pornographic film, or an actual lover? Does she have AIDS, or is she an emblem of destructive lust? One has the sense of something truly private, a dark compulsion—and this sense is only increased when, in another poem written more than ten years later, Seidel returns to a similar group of images: "I am going to go public with this/Beautiful big breasts and a penis/Military-industrial complex."

Sex is seldom less ambiguous and charged than this in Seidel's poetry. Lust is a Pavlovian tic: "The old penis smells food/And salivates." Men are predators: "Every man's a rapist till he's done." What's more, women secretly want them to be: "Don't stop when/I say stop" (from a poem titled "Her Song"). The sex act is degrading and violent: "My daughter squeaks and squeaks/Like a mouse screaming in a trap,/Dangling from the cat who makes her come/When he does it to her." These are

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poems without internal or external censors, and they give the sense of a man wholly inside his obsessions; indeed, the obsessions seem to be writing the poems. This is solipsism, perhaps, but not the contented solipsism of the egotist. It is more like the desperate isolation of the madman, or the damned soul: "God is everywhere you're not,/And you are everywhere."

Images of entrapment and entombment are eerily common in Seidel's work, so that it is no wonder he would write with uncanny intimacy (in "Dune Road, Southampton") about the paralyzed Sunny von Bulow: "Locked-in Syndrome, just about the worst./Alive, with staring eyes." Perhaps the most characteristic Seidel poem—in its claustrophobia, its arbitrariness, its nightmare plot—is "Contents Under Pressure," from *Going Fast* (1998):

> His space suit is his respirator
> breathing him
> From its own limited supply of
> oxygen...
> Absolutely nothing can be done.
> The spacecraft is under orders not
> to try and to return and does.
> He urinates and defecates
> And looks out at the universe.
> He is looking out at it through his
> helmet mask.

SEIDEL'S MATURE STYLE HAD A long incubation. His first book, published in 1963 when he was twenty-seven, was *Final Solutions*, a skillful anthology of effects borrowed from Robert Lowell: nearly every one of Seidel's poems can be traced to its Lowellian original. His next book, *Sunrise*, appeared in 1980, marking the first appearance of the style and voice and persona that would be refined over the next two decades. Perhaps that persona—worldly, depressive, corrupt—could only be the creation of a middle-aged man; as he wrote in *Sunrise*, "I took for my own motto/*I rot before I ripen.*" The savor of that rottenness, like an expensive cheese, grew richer and more complex over Seidel's next three books, which represent his best work so far: *These Days*, *My Tokyo,* and *Going Fast*. For the readers of the future, no poetry will give a better sense of what it was like to live in the decadent capital of American empire.

In the last decade Seidel's productivity accelerated rapidly, and from 2000 to 2002 he published a book a year: *The Cosmos Poems*, *Life on Earth*, and *Area Code 212*. Now brought together in one volume, they were always a single unit—an upside-down *Divine Comedy*, beginning in Heaven and descending through earthly Purgatory to the Hell of New York City. The sour wit of that conceit is worthy of Seidel, and the structure of the poems nods at its original: each book contains thirty-three poems, like Dante's thirty-three cantos, and there is a consistent (though very loose) meter, eight unrhymed quatrains per poem. For *The Cosmos Trilogy*, Seidel has added a longer hundredth poem as a capstone to the whole sequence.

But the poems do not bear out such a grand comparison: it does them no service to read them in search of a cosmology, a theology, or even a narrative. Often their quantity and loose uniformity seem to dilute the poisons that Seidel's earlier books gave us in concentrated form. Only the middle volume, *Life on Earth*, has the same proportion of successful poems as Seidel's best collections.

The Cosmos Poems is the weakest volume of the trilogy because its celestial subjects—the Big Bang, black holes, string theory—are the furthest removed from the sullied textures Seidel has mastered. He is up on the latest cosmologies, but usually these are summarized rather than dramatized: "My friend, the darkness/Into which the seed/Of all eleven dimensions/Is planted is small." String theory tells us that there are eleven dimensions, and so does Seidel, but neither of them manages to make us really feel what this means.

MOST OFTEN, SEIDEL TRIES to infuse his cosmologies with feeling by connecting them with the sentimentally human. The childhood of the universe is equated with the childhood of the poet, and it is disappointing (though perhaps not surprising) to find the rotten-ripe Seidel so nostalgic for pristine infancy: "I hear the mighty organ bellowing heaven through/The bars of my playpen..." Seidel makes something characteristic and poetically vital of the heavens only when he treats them in the manner of apocalyptic science fiction, imagining an encounter with hostile aliens in "Blue and Pink," or a mission to stop a deadly asteroid in "Poem."

Life on Earth is, naturally, a much more congenial theme. The modulation from the previous book occurs in the first poem, "Bali," which declares "I hear the cosmos" and descends rapidly:

> The generals wanted to replace
> Sukarno.
> Because of his syphilis he was losing
> touch
> With the Communist threat and
> getting rather crazy.
> So they slaughtered the Communists
> and the rich Chinese.

The tourist island is decisively tethered to its social and political reality, its *South Pacific* aura fumigated with disease and slaughter. (It is an odd and tragic example of Seidel's contemporaneity that this poem should have been published not long before the Bali nightclub bombing that killed dozens of tourists.)

Since the world is everything that is the case, *Life on Earth* is a good umbrella title for the travels, personalities, news reports, nightmares, and fantasies that have always been Seidel's subjects. "Goodness" is a kind of Yeatsian greathouse poem, in which an aristocratic French couple are proposed as ideal human types: "Have faith, give hope, show charity./This is the Château of Fontenay." The alienation and irony that Seidel usually brings to this milieu are notably absent, leaving us surprised by earnestness. But we are through the Seidelian looking-glass once again in "Doctor Love," in which the poet claims to tell about a movie treatment he once wrote, whose heroine, a breast-cancer researcher, turned out to share the name of a real breast-cancer researcher. Now, there is a real Dr. Susan Love, author of a popular guide to the disease; but it remains hard to determine whether Seidel's story is true, what it means, or whether it matters. As always with Seidel, the mystery is not just the facts, but why he is telling them to us.

STILL MORE ASTRINGENTLY BIZARRE is "At New York Hospital," in which one of Seidel's oddest obsessions returns: the "murderous head of state with beautiful big breasts." Here Seidel encounters her in the operating room, where she appears to be undergoing radiation therapy for brain cancer. By the poem's conclusion, when the anesthesiologist "joyously/Declaims Gerard Manley Hopkins," it is clear that we are not in the real world, but the zone of the poet's reiterated fan-

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tasy. It has the disquieting, surreal calm that is one of Seidel's most effective tones. He is also characteristically sharp in the rancid anti-feminist poems "Sex" and "Song," which pictures that early feminist Judith "holding / The wide-eyed bearded head of / Holofernes / Aloft." And Seidel has rarely combined sexual and political turmoil more effectively than in "Letter to the Editors of *Vogue*," an unaccountably disturbing poem. If anything limits these poems' effectiveness, it is the form. The sheer number of those quatrains is suspicious: surely they are not the perfect form for every one of these poems, and often Seidel seems to be just filling up another set of eight.

Appropriately enough, *Life on Earth* ends with the subject that has always been at the center of this poet's world, in the poem "Frederick Seidel":

> My life is a snout
> Snuffling toward the truffle, life.
> Anyway!
> It is a life of luxury. Don't put me out
> of my misery...
>
> I do love
> The sky above.

But misery moves center stage in *Area Code 212*, whose first poem revises that declaration of love: "I do love / The sky above / Which is black." In the Dantesque conceit of the trilogy, this volume locates New York in the Inferno; but, in fact, there is less concrete social observation than the title would suggest. With a few exceptions, the city appears largely as background and incidental detail: "the steps in front of the museum" at the Metropolitan, "the center strip migraine down Park Avenue," "The Upper West Side midday / Between the Hudson River and Central Park."

Instead, the most memorable poems in the book are nearly severed from plausible biographical experience: they are surreal narratives, full of dimly discerned horrors. "The Bathroom Door" is emblematic in the way it blocks the crucial events from sight, giving us only an ominous prelude and a terrible consequence:

> He hears his wife get out of their bed
> And lock the bathroom door
> That they never lock.
> ...
> She says I am so afraid.
> She says I feel cold.
> He asks her what she has done.
> He makes her stand up and walk.
> He calls 911.

Similarly, in "Downtown," someone identified only as "it" commits a murder in an art gallery; in "Getaway," the speaker is a fugitive, a kidnapper or bank robber, who warns: "They're going to check / The trunk and find our bodies." If such poems are not as vital and unsettling as Seidel's best work, it is because he is too entirely absent from them; they do not have the unstable charge that his poems carry when we cannot decide whether they are invented or real. In the slightest of these poems, the artificiality seems to be a mere matter of technique, even simply of manipulating pronouns. "I Do" makes "I" the blank subject for a random catalogue of predicates; in "March," "he" refers alternately to Seidel and to Ho Chi Minh.

These are the poems most easily assimilable to current poetic trends, but they are not the most interesting or characteristic poems in the book, still less in Seidel's whole work. We hear his voice more clearly in a poem like "MV Agusta Rally," where he looks on at a motorcycle race in Italy, or "Venus," with its fantastic sexual hostility:

> Venus is getting
> Smaller.
> Finally, she is
> The size of a mouse.
>
> A fully developed young woman
> That size
> Makes it difficult
> To caress her breasts.

THE *COSMOS TRILOGY* concludes with three poems in which the events of September 11, 2001 make an appearance, both directly and as metaphor. As one might expect from Seidel, it is the oblique approach that is more powerful. The direct version, in "The War of the Worlds," is very sentimental, imagining Seidel witnessing the events as a child in "Gray flannel little boy shorts," as though he could summon the requisite emotion only by supplementing pity with self-pity. The hundredth poem—titled, with a certain poverty of invention, "One Hundred"—is similarly uneasy in its blend of journalistic anecdote ("The people on / The top floors use their cell phones to call out") and egoistic pathos ("You fling yourself into the arms of art"). In "December," on the other hand, the image of a plane turned into a weapon seems almost spontaneous, of a piece with Seidel's customary psychic violence:

> I like the color of the smell. I like the
> odor of spoiled meat.
> I like how gangrene transubstantiates
> warm firm flesh into rotten sleet.
> When the blue blackens and they
> amputate, I fly.
> I am flying a Concorde of modern
> passengers to gangrene in the sky.

This is only the latest appearance in Seidel's poetry of the Concorde as an instrument of death. The difference here is that it has also become an instrument of purgation: "I stab the sword into the smell." But if Seidel is a moralist, he has never been the kind that wields a terrible swift sword. He has instead immersed himself in chaos and decadence, both public and psychic, in order to give them poetic expression. This ambiguous courage has made him one of the significant artists of this decadent time. ■

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TEL AVIV DIARIST

Paradise Lost

A FEW WEEKS AGO, I WENT on a press junket. This junket didn't take me to a golf course with solid gold tees and koi ponds or a ski resort that serves Kir Royales on the gondolas. Rather it took me to Israel, a country so plagued by terrorism that it received a fresh advisory from the State Department warning Americans not to travel there the very week we left. Our host, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), wanted to show us the "real" Israel—an up-close-and-personal visit to the troubled country we read so much about from the safety of our American lives. And so I would rise in my posh Tel Aviv hotel room (chocolate on the pillow, terrace over the Mediterranean), board our twelve-seater minibus (which, perhaps owing to the weight of our purpose, would break down twice before week's end), and confront the reality of today's Israel.

IN ADDITION TO AN ARMFUL OF NOTEbooks and business cards (the trappings of a true junket), I carried with me the tacit knowledge of a different Israel. In 1996, I spent ten months on a Project Otzma community service fellowship—working on a kibbutz, teaching English to Iranian immigrants in Tel Aviv and to Ethiopian children at Neve Amiel, a school in the north. I traveled all over Israel by public bus in those carefree days, when stepping onto a bus didn't occasion a confrontation with one's mortality. Today, U.S. Embassy employees and their families are prohibited from using public buses. Traveling on our private coach with AIPAC this time around, I wondered how relevant my past experience was to this emptier and tenser Israel.

A PRESS JUNKET MAKES STRONG CLAIMS about the truth: It is an opportunity to see it all for yourself, to bear witness to what is really going on. One of the things our AIPAC hosts most wanted us to see was the security fence Israel is building between itself and the West Bank. As we drove toward it, our guide said that we could see it coming up at two o'clock. Indeed, there was the telltale chain link and barbed wire. It was surrounded by fine sand (for tracking footprints), deep trenches, and electric sensors, which stymie stray cats as well as more nefarious border crossers. But was this truth? It is true I saw the fence, I mean empirically, but did seeing it really teach me anything about the reality of living in a country that feels the need to build such a barrier?

MY TIME ON OTZMA LINGERED WITH me, and I longed for the moments I experienced then: the apprehensive faces of new immigrants, the intensity of the ex-pat American hippies in Safed, my "adopted" mother's warmth when she taught me how to make guacamole, the smell of the fish ponds on the kibbutz, and the cherished cry of "*hafsakah*!"—"break time." These memories only intensified the air of unreality that hung over the junket. After we arrived at an A-list hotel that welcomed our small herd with mimosas in the lobby, the AIPAC spokeswoman reminded me that "this is the same trip we give to the congressmen." Exactly. This is not the truth of a place because it is not the real life of a place. Sometimes it is more important to stop taking notes and do something unplanned, to get off the bus. It was time for a *hafsakah*, this time from AIPAC. So a colleague and I hopped out of our ride and went to Bethlehem, where we experienced a different kind of unreality.

BETHLEHEM EXISTS IN CONTRADICtion; my impressions of it are like those of a fable, a strange Orwellian parable in which war means peace and love means hate. In Aida, one of three refugee camps in Bethlehem, I saw dozens of boys using slingshots to hurl stones at Israeli soldiers. Dozens more were playing soccer beneath scores of posters of local "martyrs." A little girl with hazel eyes and a Hamas T-shirt smiled at me. There were children everywhere. It was like a scene out of Dickens—only in this "orphanage" the cruel adults had pulled off the neat trick of being adulated and not reviled. When the hagiography is of sinners and not saints, what is a child to do? How valued can you possibly feel when the adults around you—those that are supposed to love and protect you—encourage death? In this celebration of psychosis, I felt bitter despair for the prospects of these children and for the prospects of a lasting peace.

MY TRIP TO BETHLEHEM WAS THE ONLY spontaneous moment on the junket. As we rode along in our air-conditioned chariot, I missed the free-spirited days of backpacking across Israel. Still, I couldn't help but appreciate the sanctuary of the private bus. Eating sandwiches on a bus, it seemed, was better than sitting in a crowded restaurant: One look at the blown-out husk of Maxim—a restaurant along the coast in Haifa that was visited by a suicide bomber in October—was proof of that. The hole through Maxim opened to the sea, and a bored security man with a cigarette guarded this restaurant with no more walls. Someone said the suicide bomber paid for her meal before she killed 19 people—a murderer, not a thief. I think of the children in Bethlehem: At what point does a Hamas T-shirt become an explosive vest? One of our AIPAC guides told us, "The whole world has changed in the last three years. This is not a battle for sovereignty; this is a battle for the survival of the Jewish people." The weight of this statement was felt in every pair of Israeli eyes I met this time. Gone were the optimists of 1996.

GONE TOO WERE THE RANK-AND-FILE Israelis. While the junket was filled with issues, it did not feel peopled. Each time the bus stopped, we were afforded a quick visit from an elite—from the Sharon government, the Knesset, the peace movement, the Palestinian Authority—with a fresh opinion about the current conflict. The fresh opinions almost always confirmed old clichés. Was the fence creating facts on the ground, or was the fence really negotiable? Truths or half-truths? At each lecture, I wondered which side AIPAC wasn't presenting or what questions I didn't know to ask. This restlessness caused me to reflect on what was real. Back on the bus, I held my first-class plane ticket in my hand and rested my forehead against the damp window; watching the blur of Israeli farms go by while soldiers walked on the side of the road, I concluded that you can't keep reality down for long.

SACHA ZIMMERMAN

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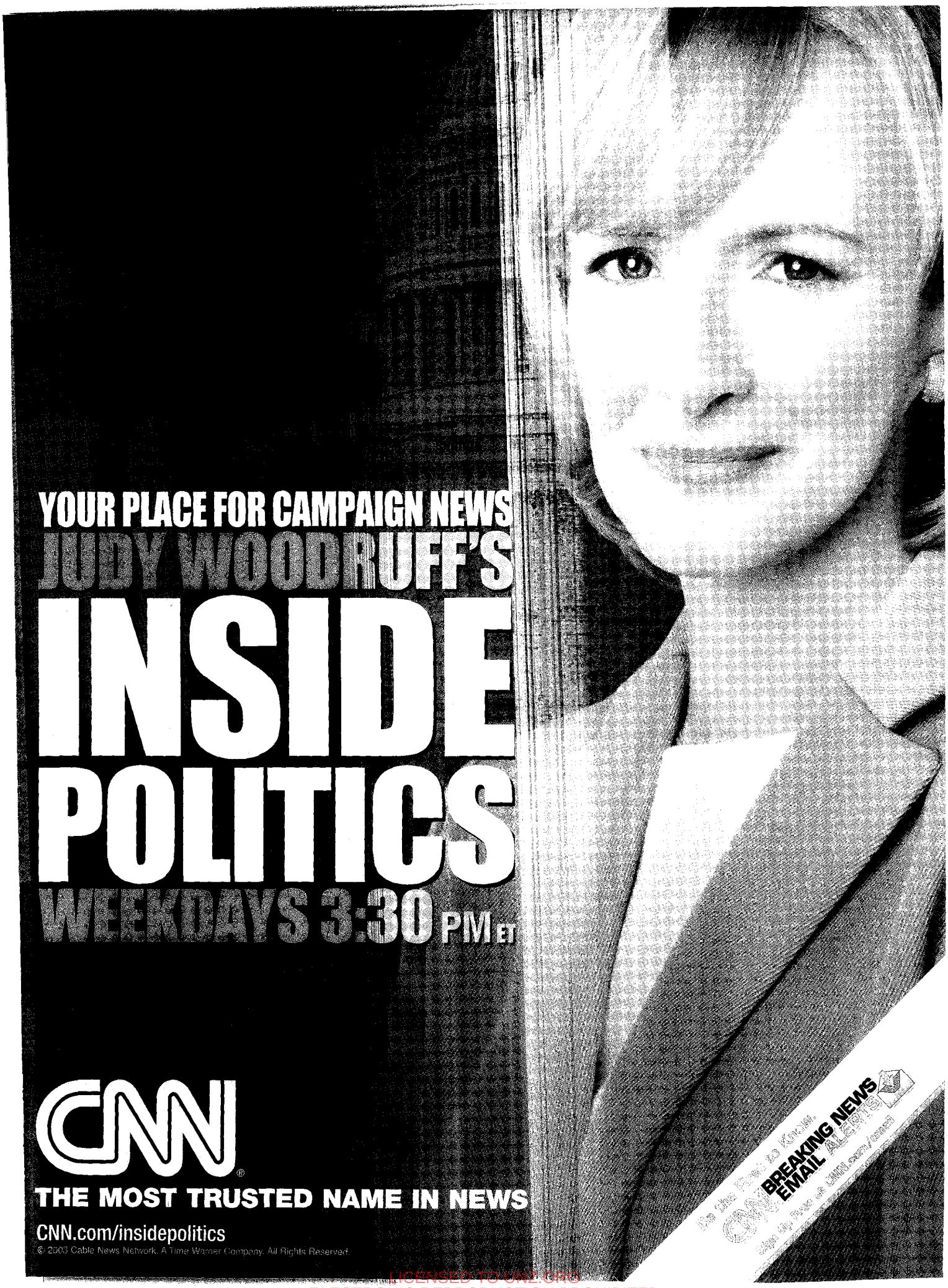
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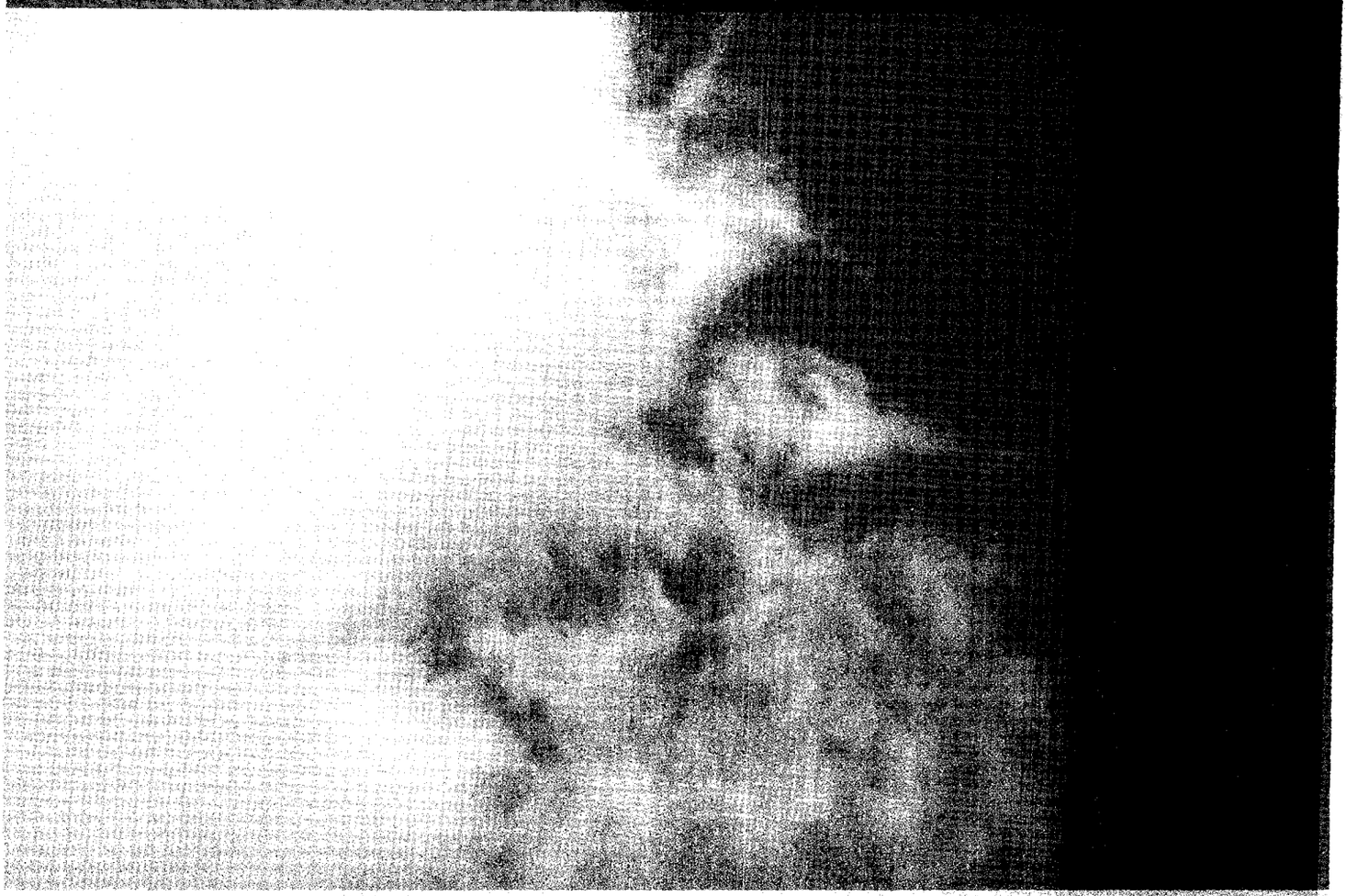

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